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THE OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE

from *Edgewater People*, by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman

Barr Center almost always excited the amusement of strangers. "Why Barr Center?" they would inquire, and follow up the query, if they were facetious, with another: "The center of what?"

In reality, Barr Center, the little village where lived the Edgewaters, the Ellertons, the Dinsmores, and a few more very good old New England families, was hardly anything but a center, and almost, regarded geographically, the mere pin prick of a center of four villages. As a matter of fact, the apex of a triangle would have been a more accurate description. The village came first on the old turnpike from the city; Barr-by-the-Sea was on the right, three miles away; Leicester, which had formerly been West Barr, was three miles to the left; South Barr was three miles to the south.

There was a popular saying that Barr Center was three miles from everywhere. All four villages had, of course, been originally one, the Precinct of Barr. Leicester had been the first to revolt and establish a separate township and claim a different name. Leicester was the name of the one wealthy old family of the village, which had bestowed its soldiers' monument, its town hall, and its library, and had improved the cemetery and contributed half of the high school.

Barr-by-the-Sea came next, and that had serious and legitimate reasons for individuality. From being a mere summer colony of tents and rude cottages it had grown to be almost a city, frequented by wealthy city folk, who had beautiful residences along the shore. Barr-by-the-Sea was so large and important that it finally made an isosceles triangle of the original Precinct of Barr. All summer long it hummed with gay life, ending in the autumn with a carnival as a grand crescendo. Barr-by-the-Sea was, however, not the center. It boasted no old family, resident all the year round, as did Barr Center.

South Barr was the least important of all. It was simply the petering out of the Barrs. It was a little farming hamlet, which humbly sold butter, fresh eggs, and garden truck to Barr-by-the-Sea for the delectation of the rich folk who dwelt in the hotels and boarding-houses and stately residences on the ocean front.

Barr-by-the-Sea was an exclusive summer resort. Its few permanent inhabitants were proud of it, and none were prouder than old Captain Joe Dickson and his wife, Martha. The Dicksons lived in a tiny house beyond the fashionable limits. They were on the opposite side of the road from the sea. The house stood in a drift of sandy soil, pierced by coarse beach grass like green swords. Captain Joe, however, had reclaimed a little garden from the easily conquered waste, and his beans, his cucumbers, and his tomatoes were flourishing.

In front of the house Martha had two great tubs of hydrangeas, which she colored a ghastly blue with bluing water from her weekly wash. Captain Joe did not approve of the unnatural blue.

"Why didn't ye leave the posies the way the Lord made 'em?" he inquired.

"They have them this way at a lot of the grand places," replied Martha. "The big-bugs color them."

"Ruther guess the big-bugs ain't any bigger than the Lord A'mighty," returned Captain Joe. "I guess if He had thought them posies would look better blue He would have made 'em blue in the fust place."

Captain Joe, having spoken his mind, puffed his pipe amiably over the tops of the blue flowers. He sat

on his bit of a porch, tipping back comfortably in his old chair.

Martha did not prolong the discussion. She was not much of a talker. Captain Joe always claimed that a voyage with him around the world in a sailing-vessel had cured her of talking too much in her youth.

“Poor Marthy used to be a regular buzz-saw at the talk,” he would say, “but rockin' round the world with such a gale that she couldn't hear her own tongue wag, and bein' scared 'most to death, cured her.”

Whether the great, primeval noises of the world had, in fact, subdued the woman to silence, rendering her incapable of much sounding of her own little note all through her life, or not, she was a very still woman. She went silently about her household tasks. When they were done there was much mending while her husband smoked.

Over across the road the littered, wave-marked beach sloped broadly to the sea. There were several boats anchored. One was Captain Joe's, the Martha Dickson. He had been out in it fishing that very morning, had had a good catch, and sold well to the customers who flocked on the beach when the fishing-boats came in. The rich people sent their servants with baskets for the fresh fish.

Joe had sold his catch, with the exception of one fine cod, which Martha was making into a savory chowder. Captain Joe sniffed with pleasure the odor of frying onions which were to make the foundation of the good dish. He gazed at the sea, which now and then lapped into view with a foaming crest over the beach. There was no passing, as a rule. The fine road for driving and motoring stopped several yards before Joe's house was reached. He was mildly surprised, therefore, when a runabout with a red cross on the front, with a young man at the wheel and a pretty young girl by his side, came skidding over the sand and stopped.

“Any fresh fish?” inquired the young man, who was Dr. Tom Ellerton.

Joe shook his head.

“Know where I can get any?”

“Guess mebbe you can get a cod at the third house from me. He was late gettin' in, and didn't sell the hull. But you'll capsize if you try to go there in that.”

Tom eyed the road billowing with sand. “Sit here while I find out,” he told Margy, his sister. She nodded.

After Tom had gone, plowing through the sand, Captain Joe rose stiffly. He was not a very old man, but a broken leg had not been set properly, and kept him from his life-work of cruising the high seas.

He limped up to the car. “Pooty hot day,” he remarked.

“Very,” replied Margy.

“Wish I'd had the fish. Sold all my catch except the cod Marthy's cookin'.”

Margy sniffed appreciatively. “A chowder?” she inquired.

Joe nodded. "About the only way to cook a cod. Goin' to have yourn cooked that way?"

"It isn't for us," explained Margy. "My brother is trying to find some really fresh fish for an old lady who is ill. My brother is a Dr.. He has just been to see her. She wanted fresh fish, and he said he would try to find some. Their servants are all busy because they are closing the house. They are going to sail for Europe to-morrow."

"What house?" inquired Joe, eagerly.

"The very large house on the ocean side of the road, about half a mile back."

"The one with all them yaller flowers in the front yard, and a garden of 'em on the roof, with vines hangin' over?"

Margy nodded. "That sounds like it," said she. "There are two square towers, one on each side, then the flowers and vines are on the balcony between; and there is a roof-garden, too; and there are quantities of beautiful flowers on the grounds. It is a lovely place."

"Know the name of the folks that live there?"

"Willard," replied Margy. She eyed Joe with surprise.

"Lord!" said he. "They goin' away so soon?"

He paid no more attention to Margy, but limped into the house, and the girl heard loud exclamations. Then she saw Tom coming with a fine glistening fish in each hand.

"I have one for us, too," he said as he got into the car. "They are fine fish."

Tom put on power, as he wished not only to deliver the fish to the Willards fresh, but to reach home with his own in good condition, and it was a scorching day. Margy clung to her side of the car as they spun along. After the fish had been left at the grand Willard house, and a beautiful young lady in a pale-blue gown had thanked the young Dr. charmingly, and they were on a smooth road, Margy asked Tom why he thought the lame man, of whom he had inquired about the fish, had been so interested in the Willard family.

"Oh, probably he is one of the old residents here. I discovered some time ago that they feel a queer interest in the comings and goings of the summer folk," said Tom. "Their lives are pretty narrow eight months of the year. They have to be interested in something outside themselves. I think lots of them have a feeling that they own a good deal that they only have liberty to look at."

"I can see how a fisherman can feel that he owns the sea," said Margy. "Maybe it is because so many of them *are* fishermen."

She looked reflective with her deep-set blue eyes. Tom cast a quick glance at her. "Maybe," he said.

Tom was not imaginative. When Margy said things like that he always wondered if she were well. He began to plan a prescription for her as they sped along.

He did not know how intensely Margy had felt that she owned the sea, just from looking at it, when she had sat in the car waiting for him when he was making professional calls, and that her reasoning was quite logical and not unnecessarily imaginative. If she considered that she owned the sea, which is the vast untaxed asset of the world, how much more would the fisherman who got his daily bread from it?

Meantime, the fisherman with whom she had talked was in excited colloquy with his wife in the kitchen and living-room of the little house. The room, though comfortable and clean, was poorly equipped, with the exception of various articles that were at direct odds with all else. There was a cooking-stove, on which the chowder was steaming. There was a kitchen table, set for a meal with the commonest utensils, save that in the center, ready for the chowder, was a bowl of old Japanese pottery which would have adorned a palace. Martha did not think much of this bowl, which Joe had brought home from one of his voyages. She considered the decorations ugly, and used it to save a lovely one from the ten-cent store, decorated with pink rosebuds. Martha could understand pink rosebuds, but she could not fathom dragons and ugly, grinning faces of Oriental fancy.

There was a lounge with a hideous cover, two old chairs worn into hollows of comfort, two kitchen chairs, an old clock, and a superb teak-wood table. Martha did not care for that, either. The contortions of the carved wood gave her a vague uneasiness. She kept it covered with an old fringed spread, and used to set her bread to rise on it. On the mantel, besides the clock and three kerosene-lamps, was a beautiful old Satsuma vase, and a pressed glass one, which Martha loved. The glass one was cracked, and she told Joe she did not see why the other vase could not have suffered instead. Joe agreed with her. He did not care much for the treasures which he had brought from foreign ports, except the shells — lovely, pinked-lipped ones that were crowded on the shelf between the other things, and completely filled more shelves which Joe had made expressly to hold them. The shelves were in three tiers, and the shells were mounted on them, catching the light from broken surfaces of rose and pearl and silver. Martha privately considered that the shells involved considerable work. She washed them carefully, and kept them free from dust, but she also admired them.

In front of the outer door was a fine old prayer-rug of dull, exquisite tones. Martha kept it there for Joe to wipe his feet on, because it was so faded, but she had a bright red one in the center of the room. Joe never stepped on that until his shoes were entirely clean. He had made quite sure there was not a speck of dust to injure this brilliant rug before he entered to give Martha the intelligence.

“They are goin' away from Our House to-morrow,” said he.

Martha, standing over the chowder, turned, spoon in hand. She waved the spoon as if it were a fan. “Before the carnival?” said she.

Martha was a small, wide-eyed woman with sleek hair. She was not pretty, but had a certain effect of being exactly in place which gave the impression of prettiness to some people.

“They are goin' to sail for Europe,” said Joe.

“I suppose for His health,” said Martha. Nobody could excel the air of perfect proprietorship with which she uttered the masculine pronoun. The man indicated might have been her own father, or her brother, or her son.

“I guess so,” said Joe. “He has looked pooty bad lately when I've seen him.”

"I suppose They are goin'?"

"I s'pose so, because they are closin' the house. That young Dr. from the Center stopped out here just now, and wanted to know where he could get fresh fish, and I told him I guessed Mac had some left; and whilst he was gone his sister — she was with him — told me they were closin' the house, and Old Lady Willard wanted fresh fish, and they were out huntin' for it, because all the help was busy."

"That means Old Lady Willard's goin', and Him, and his Wife, and the three girls, Grace and Marie and Maud, and the two little boys."

"Yes."

"And they will take the ladies'-maids, and His man. Maybe that pretty young lady that visits there so much will go, too."

"Maybe; and the lady that teaches the little boys will go."

"O Lord, yes! They couldn't get on without her. My! there will be 'most enough to fill the ship."

"About enough to sink my old one I sailed around when you was aboard," said Joe, and laughed.

Martha never laughed. The seriousness of New England was in her very soul. She was happy and good-natured, but she saw nothing whatever to laugh at in all creation. She never had.

"Land, yes!" said she. "You know there wa'n't any room in that little cabin."

"Not more'n enough to hold you and your Bible and sewin'-machine," said Captain Joe. He cast a glance at the old sewing-machine as he spoke, and laughed again. It was perfectly useless because of that long-ago voyage, and the fact always amused him. Martha considered it no laughing matter. The sewing-machine was dear to her, even in its wrecked state. She kept the Bible on it, and a little cup and saucer.

"The chowder's done," said she. "Draw up, Joe."

Joe drew up a chair to the table. "Smells prime," said he.

"Guess it's all right."

"Ef your chowders ever wa'n't all right I'd think the sun was goin' to rise in the west next mornin'," said Joe.

Martha ladled the chowder into the beautiful bowl, then into heavy, chipped plates. The two ate with relish.

"To-morrow's Saturday," said Joe. "That means we can go to Our House come Sunday."

Martha nodded. Her good mouth widened in the semblance of a smile. Her steady eyes gleamed with happy intelligence at her husband.

“It will seem nice,” said she. “Land! I'd been thinkin' we might have to wait till 'way into October, the way we did last year, and now it's only the first of August.”

“I'm feelin' jest as set up as you be about it,” said Joe.

That night all the family from the great house where Tom Ellerton had called went by train to Boston. They were to stay in the city overnight to be ready for the steamer. Not one of the numerous company even noticed Captain Joe Dickson and his wife Martha, who were at the station watching them closely, hearing everything that was said, noting all details — the baggage, the host of servants.

All the servants were to be out of the house next day, the Dicksons heard Her tell another lady who inquired. “Only a caretaker, the same old colored man we always employ,” stated Mrs. Richard Willard, tall, elegant, a bit weary of manner. “The servants will finish closing the house to-morrow, then some of them have vacations, and the rest will be in our Boston house. We take only our maids and Mr. Willard's man up to-night. We shall not go to the city house at all ourselves. It will be much more sensible to stay at the hotel.”

“Of course,” said the lady. Then she said something about an unexpected start, and so early in the season, and Mrs. Willard replied that to her nothing was ever unexpected. That had ceased with her youth, and Mr. Willard was not quite well, and there were seasons all over creation. She said that with a pleasant smile — weary, however.

Martha eyed her keenly when she and Joe, after the train with all the Willards on board had pulled out, were walking home.

“She said that She didn't look none too strong, and she guessed it was a good thing She was going.” Martha said that as if Mrs. Richard Willard, who had never heard of her, was her dearly beloved friend or relative.

Joe nodded solemnly. “She did look sorter peaked,” he agreed. “As for Him, he didn't look no worse than usual to me, but I guess it's jest as well for them they're off, let alone us.”

The remark seemed enigmatic, but Martha understood. They walked home from the station. They passed the Willard house, standing aloof from the highway like a grand Colonial lady.

“The awnin's are down,” said Martha, “and they've begun to board up the winders.”

Joe nodded.

“It is unlooked for, as far as we are concerned,” said Martha, with a happy widening of her lips.

“Day arter to-morrer — only think of it!” said Captain Joe.

“Goin' out fishin' to-morrer?”

“Reckon not; got an considerable to-day, and I want to git my hair cut to-morrer.”

“I'm goin' to trim my bunnit over, and fix my best dress a little, too; and I guess your best suit needs brushin'.”

“There's a spot on the coat.”

“I'll git it off. Land! I do hope Sunday is pleasant.”

“Goin' to be. It's a dry moon,” declared Joe.

However, Sunday, although fair, was one of those fervid days of summer which threatened storm.

“It's goin' to shower,” declared Martha. She was clad in her best black silk, hot, and tightly fitted, trimmed with cascades of glittering jet. A jet aigrette on her bonnet caught the light. She had fastened a vivid rose on one side of the bonnet to do honor to the occasion. Crowning glory — she wore her white gloves, her one pair, which was the treasure of her wardrobe.

“Better take the umbrell', I guess,” said Joe.

“Guess you'd better.”

Joe held his head stiffly because of his linen collar. He wore a blue suit much too large for him, but it was spotless. He took the umbrella from behind the door. It was distinctly not worthy of the occasion, although it was entirely serviceable. Still, it was large, and greenish-black, and bulged determinedly from its mooring of rubber at the top.

Martha, as they walked along, looked uncomfortably at the umbrella. “Can't ye roll the umbrell' up tight, the way I see 'em?” she inquired.

Joe stopped, unfastened the rubber strap, and essayed to roll it. It was in vain. “The umbrell' is too thick,” he said. “No use, Marthy. It's a good umbrell'. If it showers it will keep it off, but I can't make it look slim.”

“Well, don't show it any more than you can help,” admonished Martha.

Joe henceforth carried the umbrella between himself and Martha. It continually collided with their legs, but Martha's black-silk skirt flopped over its green voluminousness and it was comparatively unseen.

“I declare; it does seem like showerin',” said Joe.

“You said it was a dry moon.”

“Ef thar's anything in nature to be depended on least of anything else it's a dry moon,” said Joe, with an air of completely absolving himself from all responsibility in the matter of the moon.

“Of course in such hot weather nobody can tell when a thunder-tempest is goin' to come up,” said Martha. She was extremely uncomfortable in her tight black raiment. Drops of perspiration stood on her forehead.

“If we were goin' anywhere else I'd take off my gloves,” said she.

“Well, Marthy, long as it's the first time this year, reckon you'd better stand it, if you can,” returned Joe.

“My collar is about chokin' me, but it's the first time this year we're goin' there, you know, Marthy.”

“That's just the way I feel,” agreed Martha.

The sun beat upon their heads. “Ef the umbrell' was a little better-lookin' I'd h'ist her,” said Joe.

“Now, Joe, you know you can't.”

“I know it, Marthy. I can't.”

They were now in the midst of a gay, heterogeneous Sunday throng. The church-bells were ringing. A set of chimes outpealed the rest. Elegantly arrayed people — the ladies holding brilliant parasols at all angles above their heads crowned with plumes and flowers; the gentlemen in miraculously creased trousers, many of them moving with struts, swinging sticks — met and went their way. The road was filled with a never-ending procession of motor-cars, carriages, horses, and riders. Barr-by-the-Sea was displaying her charms like a beauty at a ball.

Many were bound for church; more for pleasure. There were country people dressed in cheap emulation of the wealthy, carrying baskets with luncheon, who had come to Barr-by-the-Sea to spend Sunday and have an outing. They were silent, foolishly observant, and awed by the splendors around them.

Joe Dickson and his wife Martha moved as the best of them. There was no subserviency in them. They had imbibed the wide freedom and lordliness of the sea, and at any time moved among equals; but to-day their errand made them move as lords. By what childlike sophistry it had come to pass none could tell, but Joe Dickson, poor ex-captain of a sailing-vessel, and his wife Martha were, in their own conviction, on their way to re-establishment in the best mansion on that coast, inhabited by the wealthy of the country.

When they reached the Willard house Joe and Martha ducked under the iron chain across the carriage-drive, and proceeded along the glittering smoothness bordered by brilliant flowers, having no realization of the true state of affairs.

“I declare, it does seem good to get back,” said Joe.

“It certainly does,” said Martha, “and so much earlier than we'd looked forward to.”

“I calculated they might stay till late in October, the way they did last year,” said Joe, joyously. “Just see that red-geranium bed, Marthy.”

“Them ain't geraniums; them is begonias,” said Martha, haughtily.

“It always seems to me as if all the flowers was geraniums,” said Joe. He laughed.

Martha did not smile. “They ain't,” said she.

They passed around to the back of the grand house. The wide veranda was cleared except for two weather-beaten old chairs. The windows, except one on the second floor, were boarded over. The house looked as if asleep, with closed eyes, before that magnificent ocean, a vast brilliance as of gemlike

facets reflecting all the glory of the whole earth and the heavens above the earth. The tide was coming in. Now and then a wave broke with a rainbow toss, quite over the sea wall of the beach. The coast in places — and this was one of them — was treacherous.

Captain Joe and his Martha sat down in the rude chairs. Martha sighed a sigh of utter rapture.

“Land! it is certainly nice to be here again,” said she.

Joe, however, scowled at the sea wall. “They had ought to have seen to that wall afore they went off,” he said.

“Land! It's safe, ain't it?”

“I dunno'. Nobody never knows nothin' when the sea's consarned. Ef they had asked me I'd said: ‘Hev a lot of men on the job, and make sure there ain't no shaky places in that 'ere wall; and whilst you're about it, build it up about six foot higher. It wouldn't cut off your view none.’ The hull of it is, the sea never quits the job. Everything on earth quits the job, one way or t'other, but that sea is right on, and she's goin' to be right on it; and bein' right on the job, and never quittin', means somethin' doin' and somethin' bein' done, and nobody knows just what.”

“I guess it's all right,” said Martha. “It ain't likely that They would have gone off and left this house unless it was; and money ain't no object.”

“Sometimes folks with money gits the wrong end of the bargain,” said Joe. “Money don't mean nothin' to the sea. It's swallowed more'n the hull earth holds, and it's ready to swallow till the day of jedgment. That wall had ought to be looked arter.”

There was a sound of the one unboarded window being opened, and it immediately framed an aged colored face, with a fringe of gray beard like wool. The owner of the face could not be seen, and, because of the veranda roof, he could not see, but, his ears being quick to note sounds above the rush of the waters, he heard Joe and Martha talking on the veranda. Presently he came up the veranda steps. He was the caretaker, and his door of entrance and exit was in the basement, under the veranda. He was a tall old colored man with an important mien.

When his head appeared above the veranda floor Joe and Martha rose. “Good day, Sam,” they said almost in concert.

Sam bowed with dignity. “I 'lowed it was you,” he said, then sat down on a fixed stone bench near the chairs.

“So they've gone,” said Joe, as he and Martha resumed their seats.

“Yassir. Mr. Richard is kind of pindlin', and the Dr. 'lowed he'd better get away. They went day before yesterday, and all the help last night.”

Joe nodded. Martha nodded. They all sat still, watching the waves dash at the sea wall and break over it.

“They had ought to have looked at that wall,” said Joe, presently.

The colored man laughed with the optimism of his race. "That wall has held more'n twenty year — eber since the house was built," said he. "Wall all right."

"Dunno'," said Joe.

Martha was not as optimistic as the colored man, but she was entirely happy. "Seems sorter nice to be settin' here ag'in, Sam," said she.

"Yes'm," said Sam.

"We've got a baked fish for dinner, and some fresh beans," said Martha. "We thought you'd come and have dinner with us, the way you always do the first day."

"I 'lowed you'd ask me, thank ye, marm," said Sam, with his wonderful dignity.

"Seems nice to be settin' here ag'in," repeated Martha, like a bird with one note.

"Yes'm." Sam's own face wore a pleased expression. He, too, felt the charm of possession. All three, the man and wife and the colored retainer, realized divine property rights. The outside of that grand house was as much theirs as it was any soul's on the face of the earth. They owned that and the ocean. Only Joe's face was now and then disturbed when a wave, crested in foam, came over the sea wall. He knew the sea well enough to love and fear it, while he owned it.

The three sat there all the morning. Then they all went away to the little Dickson house. The thunder was rumbling in the northwest. They walked rapidly. Joe spread the umbrella, but no rain came. There was a sharp flash of lightning and a prodigious report. All three turned about and looked in the direction of the Willard house.

"Struck somewheres, but it didn't strike thar," said Joe.

When they reached home Martha immediately changed her dress and set about preparing dinner. The two men sat on Joe's upturned boat, on the sloping beach opposite, and smoked and watched the storm. It did not rain for a long time, although the thunder and lightning were terrific. The colored man cringed at the detonations and flashes, but Joe was obdurate. He had sailed stormy seas too much to be anything but a cool critic of summer showers. However, after each unusual flash and report the two stared in the direction of the Willard house.

"Seems as if I had ought to have stayed there," remarked Sam, trembling, after one great crash.

"What could you have done? That didn't strike no house. Struck out at sea. I'm keepin' an ear out for the fire alarm," said Joe.

"Have you got it ready?" inquired Sam, mysteriously.

Joe nodded. He flushed slightly. Sam was under orders to keep secret the fact that the poor old sailorman had the preceding year purchased a fire-extinguisher, with a view to personally protecting the House. "You can run faster than I can, and you know how to use it," said Joe.

Then another storm came up swiftly. Martha came to the door. "It's another!" cried she.

Joe rose. "Get it for me, Marthy," said he.

Martha brought the fire-extinguisher.

"Guess you and me had better be on the bridge ef another's comin'," said Joe, grimly, to Sam.

The two disappeared down the road in a gray drive of rain. Martha screamed to Joe to take the umbrella, his best suit would get wet, but he did not hear her. Sam went on a run and Joe hobbled after. They stood on the Willard veranda and kept watch. Both men were drenched. The waves broke over the sea wall, and the salt wind drove the rain in the faces of the men.

At last it was over, and they went back to the Dickson house. The odor of fish and beans greeted them. Martha had continued her dinner preparations. She was not in the least afraid of storms. She, too, only thought of danger to the grand house, but she had great faith in her husband and the fire-extinguisher, whose unknown virtues loomed gigantic to her feminine mind.

She made Joe change his best suit, which she hung carefully to dry on the clothes-line, and she gave Sam a ragged old suit, and hung up his drenched attire also. "You couldn't do much about taking care of things if you got the rheumatiz," said she.

They ate their dinner in comfort, for the thunder-storm had conquered the heat. Afterward, while Martha cleared away, the men sat on the porch and went to sleep. Martha herself slept on the old lounge. She dreamed that she was on the veranda of the Willard house and she awoke to no disillusion. Next day, and all the following days, for nearly a whole year, she and Joe could be there if they chose. They were in possession; for so long that dispossession seemed unreality.

That was the happiest summer Joe and Martha had ever know in Barr-by-the-Sea. There were long afternoons, when Joe had been out and sold his catch; there were wonderful moonlit nights, when they lived on the outside of the beautiful house and inherited the earth.

The fall was late that year. Long into October, and even during warm days in November, they could assemble on the veranda and enjoy their wealth. There came a storm in October, however, which increased Joe's fears concerning the stanchness of the sea wall. He conferred with Sam. Sam was hard to move from his position that the past proved the future, but finally his grudging assistance was obtained. The two worked hard. They did what they could, but even then Joe would look at the wall and shake his head.

"She ought to be six foot higher," he told Martha.

If Sam could have written, he would have pleaded with him to write the Willards abroad, urging that they order the raising of the wall, but Sam could not write. Joe went to a real-estate agent and talked, but the man laughed at him.

"Don't butt in, Joe," he advised. "Nobody is going to thank you. I think the wall is all right."

"It ain't," declared Joe.

Joe was right. In December there came the storm and the high tide. Joe was up at two o'clock in the morning, awakened by the wild cry of the sea, that wildest of all creation, which now and then runs amuck and leaps barriers and makes men dream of prehistoric conditions.

He hastened along the road, with that terrible menace in his ears, dragging a great length of rope. Martha stayed behind on her knees, praying. Nobody ever knew quite what happened; that is, all the details. They did know that in some miraculous fashion the sea wall of the Willard house had been strengthened by frantic labor of poor men who owned not a stick as valuable as the poorest beam in the house, and that they were urged on by Captain Joe Dickson, with his lame leg and his heart of a lover and a hero. They knew that strange things had been piled against that wall; all the weighty articles from the basement of the Willard house — wood, boats, sandbags, stones, everything which had power to offer an ounce of resistance. They knew that the wall stood and the house was saved, and old Sam was blubbering over old Captain Joe Dickson lying spent almost to death on the veranda where he had been carried.

“Tell Marthy Our House is safe,” stammered old Captain Joe. Then he added something which was vaguely made out to be a note of triumph. “The sea didn't git me.”

When they took him home to Martha she was very calm. All her life, since she had married Joe, she had had in her heart the resolution which should be in the hearts of the wives of all poor sailormen and fishermen, who defy the splendid, eternal danger of the sea to gain their sustenance.

It was Dr. Tom Ellerton, spinning over from Barr Center, at the risk of his neck and his car, who saved Captain Joe, although the old man was saved only to spend the rest of his life in bed or wheel-chair, and never could sail the seas again. It was Dr. Tom Ellerton who told the Willards, and it was they who sent the wheel-chair and gave Joe a pension for saving their house. Mrs. Richard Willard (Richard had died during their stay abroad) came out on purpose to see Joe. She was sad, and weary, and elegant in her deep black.

She told Joe and Martha what was to be done, and they thanked her and gave her daughter some of their choicest shells. They were quite dignified and grateful about her bounty. On the train going home Mrs. Willard told her daughter that they were evidently superior people. “They belong to the few who can take with an air of giving and not offend,” said Mrs. Willard.

Neither of them dreamed of the true state of the case: that subtly and happily the old man and his wife possessed what they called their own home in a fuller sense than they ever could. More than the announcement of the comfortable annuity had meant Mrs. Willard's statement that they would not open the House at all next summer; they would visit with relatives in the Berkshires, then go abroad.

Joe and Martha looked at each other, and their eyes said: “We can go to Our House as soon as you can wheel me over there. We can stay there as much as we like, all one year.”

Mrs. Willard saw the look, and did not understand. How could she? It was inconceivable that these two people should own the outside of her home to such an extent that their tenure became well-nigh immortal.

THE HILLS OF HOME

by Alfred Coppel

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+-----+
| _ "Normality" is a myth; we're all a little neurotic, and the |
| study of neurosis has been able to classify the general |
| types of disturbance which are most common. And some types |
| (providing the subject is not suffering so extreme a case as |
| to have crossed the border into psychosis) can be not only |
| useful, but perhaps necessary for certain kinds of work...._ |
+-----+

_The river ran still and deep, green and gray in the eddies with the warm smell of late summer rising out of the slow water. Madrone and birch and willow, limp in the evening quiet, and the taste of smouldering leaves....

It wasn't the Russian River. It was the Sacred Iss. The sun had touched the gem-encrusted cliffs by the shores of the Lost Sea of Korus and had vanished, leaving only the stillness of the dusk and the lonely cry of shore birds.

From downstream came the faint sounds of music. It might have been a phonograph playing in one of the summer cabins with names like Polly Ann Roost and Patches and Seventh Heaven, but to Kimmy it was the hated cry of the Father of Therns calling the dreadful Plant Men to their feast of victims borne into this Valley Dor by the mysterious Iss.

Kimmy shifted the heavy Martian pistol into his left hand and checked his harness. A soft smile touched his lips. He was well armed; there was nothing he had to fear from the Plant Men. His bare feet turned up-stream, away from the sound of the phonograph, toward the shallows in the river that would permit him to cross and continue his search along the base of the Golden Cliffs--_

* * * * *

The sergeant's voice cut through the pre-dawn darkness. "Oh, three hundred, Colonel.... Briefing in thirty minutes."

Kimball tried to see him in the black gloom. He hadn't been asleep. It would have been hard to waste this last night that way. Instead he had been remembering. "All right, Sergeant," he said. "Coming up."

He swung his feet to the bare boards and sat for a moment, wishing he hadn't had to give up smoking. He could almost imagine the textured taste of the cigaret on his tongue.

Oddly enough, he wasn't tired. He wasn't excited, either. And that was much stranger. He stood up and opened the window to look out into the desert night. Overhead the stars were brilliant and cold. Mars gleamed russet-colored against the sable sky. He smiled, remembering again. So long a road, he thought, from then to now.

Then he stopped smiling and turned away from the window. It hadn't been an easy path and what was coming up now was the hardest part. The goddam psychs were the toughest, always wanting him to bug out on the deal because of their brainwave graphs and word association tests and their Rorschach blots.

"You're a lonely man, Colonel Kimball----"

"Too much imagination could be bad for this job."

How could you sit there with pentothal in your veins and wires running out of your head and tell them about the still waters of Korus, or the pennons flying from the twin towers of Greater Helium or the way the tiny, slanting sun gleamed at dawn through the rigging of a flyer?

Kimball snapped on a light and looked at his watch. 0310. Zero minus one fifty. He opened the steel locker and began to dress.

* * * * *

_The water swirled warm and velvety around his ankles. There, behind that madrone, Kimmy thought. Was that a Plant Man? The thick white trunk and the grasping, blood-sucking arms----

The radium pistol's weight made his wrist ache, but he clung to it tightly, knowing that he could never cope with a Plant Man with a sword alone. The certainty of coming battle made him smile a little, the way John Carter would smile if he were here in the Valley Dor ready to attack the white Therns and their Plant Men.

For a moment, Kimmy felt a thrill of apprehension. The deepening stillness of the river was closing in around him. Even the music from the phonograph was very, very faint. Above him, the great vault of the sky was changing from pink to gray to dusty blue. A bright star was breaking through the curtain of fading light. He knew it was Venus, the Evening Star. But let it be Earth, he thought. And instead of white, let it be the color of an emerald.

He paused in midstream, letting the warm water riffle around his feet.

Looking up at the green beacon of his home planet, he thought: I've left all that behind me. It was never really what I wanted. Mars is where I belong. With my friends, Tars Tarkas the great Green Jeddak, and Carter, the Warlord, and all the beautiful brave people._

* * * * *

_The phonograph sang with Vallee's voice: "Cradle me where southern skies can watch me with a million eyes----"

Kimmy's eyes narrowed and he waded stealthily across the sacred river. That would be Matai Shang, the Father of Holy Therns--spreading his arms to the sunset and standing safely on his high balcony in the Golden Cliffs while the Plant Men gathered to attack the poor pilgrims Iss had brought to this cursed valley.

"Sing me to sleep, lullaby of the leaves"--the phonograph sang. Kimmy stepped cautiously ashore and moved into the cover of a clump of willows. The sky was darkening fast. Other stars were shining through. There wasn't much time left._

* * * * *

Kimball stood now in the bright glare of the briefing shack, a strange figure in blood-colored plastic. The representatives of the press had been handed the mimeographed releases by the PRO and now they sat in silence, studying the red figure of the man who was to ride the rocket.

They were thinking: Why him? Out of all the scores of applicants--because there are always applicants for a sure-death job--and all the qualified pilots, why this one?

The Public Relations Officer was speaking now, reading from the mimeoed release as though these civilians couldn't be trusted to get the sparse information given them straight without his help, given grudgingly and without expression.

Kimball listened, only half aware of what was being said. He watched the faces of the men sitting on the rows of folding chairs, saw their eyes like wounds, red from the early morning hour and the murmuring reception of the night before in the Officers' Club. They are wondering how _I_ feel, he was thinking. And asking themselves why I want to go.

On the dais nearby, listening to the PRO, but watching Kimball, sat Steinhart, the team analyst. Kimball returned his steady gaze thinking: They start out burning with desire to cure the human mind and end with the shadow of the images. The words become the fact, the therapy the aim. What could Steinhart know of longing? No, he thought, I'm not being fair. Steinhart was only doing his job.

The big clock on the back wall of the briefing shack said three fifty-five. Zero minus one hour and five minutes.

Kimball looked around the room at the pale faces, the open mouths. What have I to do with you now, he thought?

* * * * *

Outside, the winter night lay cold and still over the Base. Floodlights spilled brilliance over the dunes and the scrubby earth, high fences casting laced shadows across the burning white expanses of ferroconcrete.

As they filed out of the briefing shack, Steinhart climbed into the command car with Kimball. Chance or design? Kimball wondered. The others, he noticed, were leaving both of them alone.

"We haven't gotten on too well, have we, Colonel?" Steinhart observed in a quiet voice.

Kimball thought: He's pale skinned and very blond. What is it that he reminds me of? Shouldn't there be a diadem on his forehead? He smiled vaguely into the rumbling night. That's what it was. Odd that he should have forgotten. How many rocket pilots, he wondered, were weaned on Burroughs' books? And how many remembered now that the Thern priests all wore yellow wings and a circlet of gold with some fantastic jewel on their forehead?

"We've done as well as could be expected," he said.

Steinhart reached for a cigaret and then stopped, remembering that Kimball had had to give them up because of the flight. Kimball caught the movement and half-smiled.

"I didn't try to kill the assignment for you, Kim," the psych said.

"It doesn't matter now."

"No, I suppose not."

"You just didn't think I was the man for the job."

"Your record is good all the way. You know that," Steinhart said. "It's just some of the things----"

Kimball said: "I talked too much."

"You had to."

"You wouldn't think my secret life was so dangerous, would you," the Colonel said smiling.

"You were married, Kim. What happened?"

"More therapy?"

"I'd like to know. This is for me."

* * * * *

Kimball shrugged. "It didn't work. She was a fine girl--but she finally told me it was no go. 'You don't live here' was the way she put it."

"She knew you were a career officer; what did she expect----?"

"That isn't what she meant. You know that."

"Yes," the psych said slowly. "I know that."

They rode in silence, across the dark Base, between the concrete sheds and the wooden barracks. Overhead, the stars like dust across the sky. Kimball, swathed in plastic, a fantastic figure not of earth, watched them wheel across the clear, deep night.

"I wish you luck, Kim," Steinhart said. "I mean that."

"Thanks." Vaguely, as though from across a deep and widening gulf.

"What will you do?"

"You know the answers as well as I," the Colonel said impatiently. "Set up the camp and wait for the next rocket. If it comes."

"In two years."

"In two years," the plastic figure said. Didn't he know that it didn't matter?

He glanced at his watch. Zero minus fifty-six minutes.

"Kim," Steinhart said slowly. "There's something you should know about. Something you really should be prepared for."

"Yes?" Disinterest in his voice now, Steinhart noted clinically. Natural under the circumstances? Or neurosis building up already?

"Our tests showed you to be a schizoid--well-compensated, of course. You

know there's no such thing as a _normal_ human being. We all have tendencies toward one or more types of psychoses. In your case the symptoms are an overly active imagination and in some cases an inability to distinguish reality from--well, fancy."

* * * * *

Kimball turned to regard the psych coolly. "What's reality, Steinhart? Do _you_ know?"

The analyst flushed. "No."

"I didn't think so."

"You lived pretty much in your mind when you were a child," Steinhart went on doggedly. "You were a solitary, a lonely child."

Kimball was watching the sky again.

Steinhart felt futile and out of his depth. "We know so little about the psychology of space-flight, Kim----"

Silence. The rumble of the tires on the packed sand of the road, the murmur of the command car's engine, spinning oilily, and lit by tiny sunbright flashes deep in the hollows of the hot metal.

"You're glad to be leaving, aren't you--" Steinhart said finally. "Happy to be the first man to try for the planets----"

Kimball nodded absently, wishing the man would be quiet. Mars, a dull rusty point of light low on the horizon, seemed to beckon.

They topped the last hillock and dropped down into the lighted bowl of the launching site. The rocket towered, winged and monstrously checkered in white and orange, against the first flickerings of the false dawn.

* * * * *

Kimmy saw the girls before they saw him. In their new, low waisted middies and skirts, they looked strange and out of place standing by the pebbled shore of the River Iss.

They were his sisters, Rose and Margaret. Older than he at fifteen and seventeen. But they walked by the river and into danger. Behind him he could hear the rustling sound of the Plant Men as the evening breeze came up.

"Kimm-eeeeee--"

They were calling him. In the deepening dusk their voices carried far down the river. "KimmMMM--eeeeeeeeee--"

He knew he should answer them, but he did not. Behind him he could hear the awful Plant Men approaching. He shivered with delicious horror.

He stood very still, listening to his sisters talking, letting their voices carry down to where he hid from the dangers of the Valley Dor.

"Where is that little brat, anyway?"

"He always wanders off just at dinnertime and then we have to find him----"

"Playing with that old faucet--" Mimicry. "My rad-ium pis-tol----"

"Cracked--just cracked. Oh, where IS he, anyway? KimmM-eee, you AN-swer!"

Something died in him. It wasn't a faucet, it WAS a radium pistol. He looked at his sisters with dismay. They weren't really his sisters. They were Therns, with their yellow hair and their pale skins. He and John Carter and Tars Tarkas had fought them many times, piling their bodies for barricades and weaving a flashing pattern of skillful swords in the shifting light of the two moons.

"KimmMMM--eeee Mom's going to be mad at you! Answer us!"

If only Tars Tarkas would come now. If only the great Green Jeddak would come splashing across the stream on his huge thoat, his two swords clashing----

"He's up there in that clump of willows--hiding!"

"Kimmy! You come down here this instant!"

The Valley Dor was blurring, fading. The Golden Cliffs were turning into sandy, river-worn banks. The faucet felt heavy in his grimy hand. He shivered, not with horror now. With cold.

He walked slowly out of the willows, stumbling a little over the rocks._

* * * * *

He lay like an embryo in the viscera of the ship, protected and quite alone. The plastic sac contained him, fed him; and the rocket, silent now, coursed through the airless deep like a questing thought. Time was measured by the ticking of the telemeters and the timers, but Kimball slept insulated and complete.

And he dreamed.

He dreamed of that summer when the river lay still and deep under the hanging willows. He dreamed of his sisters, thin and angular creatures as he remembered them through the eyes of a nine-year-old----

And his mother, tall and shadowy, standing on the porch of the rented cottage and saying exasperatedly: "_ Why do you run off by yourself, Kimmy? I worry about you so----_"

And his sisters: "_ Playing with his wooden swords and his radium pistol and never wanting to take his nose out of those awful books----_"

He dreamed of the low, beamed ceiling of the cottage, sweltering in the heat of the summer nights and the thick longing in his throat for red hills and a sky that burned deep blue through the long, long days and canals, clear and still. A land that he knew somehow never was, but which lived, for him, through some alchemy of the mind. He dreamed of Mars.

And Steinhart: "_ What is reality, Kimmy?_"

* * * * *

The hours stretched into days, the days into months. Time wasn't. Time was a deep night and a starshot void. And dreams.

He awoke seldom. His tasks were simple. The plastic sac and the tender care of the ship were more real than the routine jobs of telemetering information back to the Base across the empty miles, across the rim of the world.

He dreamed of his wife. "_ You don't live here, Kim._"

She was right, of course. He wasn't of earth. Never had been. My love is in the sky, he thought, filled with an immense satisfaction.

And time slipped by, the weeks into months; the sun dwindled and earth was gone. All around him lay the stunning star-dusted night.

He lay curled in the plastic womb when the ship turned. He awoke sluggishly and dragged himself into awareness.

"I've changed," he thought aloud. "My face is younger; I feel different."

The keening sound of air over the wings brought a thrill. Below him, a great curving disk of reds and browns and yellows. He could see dust

storms raging and the heavy, darkened lines of the canals.

There was skill in his hands. He righted the rocket, balanced it. Began the tricky task of landing. It took all of his talent, all of his training. Ponderously, the ship settled into the iron sand; slowly, the internal fires died.

* * * * *

Kimball stood in the control room, his heart pounding. Slowly, the ports opened. Through the thick quartz he could see the endless plain. Reddish brown, empty. The basin of some long ago sea. The sky was a deep, burning blue with stars shining at midday at the zenith. It looked unreal, a painting of unworldly quiet and desolation.

What is reality, Kimmy?

Steinhart was right, he thought vaguely. A tear streaked his cheek. He had never been so alone.

And then he imagined he saw something moving on the great plain. He scrambled down through the ship, past the empty fuel tanks and the lashed supplies. His hands were clawing desperately at the dogs of the outer valve. Suddenly the pressure jerked the hatch from his hands and he gasped at the icy air, his lungs laboring to breathe.

He dropped to one knee and sucked at the thin, frigid air. His vision was cloudy and his head felt light. But there _was_ something moving on the plain.

A shadowy cavalcade.

* * * * *

Strange monstrous men on fantastic war-mounts, long spears and fluttering pennons. Huge golden chariots with scythes flashing on the circling hubs and armored giants, the figments of a long remembered dream----

He dropped to the sand and dug his hands into the dry powdery soil. He could scarcely see now, for blackness was flickering at the edges of his vision and his failing heart and lungs were near collapse.

Kimm-eee!

A huge green warrior on a gray monster of a thot was beckoning to him. Pointing toward the low hills on the oddly near horizon.

Kimm-eeee!

The voice was thin and distant on the icy wind. Kimball knew that voice. He knew it from long ago in the Valley Dor, from the shores of the Lost Sea of Korus where the tideless waters lay black and deep----

He began stumbling across the empty, lifeless plain. He knew the voice, he knew the man, and he knew the hills that he must reach, quickly now, or die.

They were the hills of home.

THE HOUSE-WARMING.

from *A Country Idyl and Other Stories*, by Sarah Knowles Bolton

“ALMOST ready for the great event,” said Mr. Josiah Midland, portly and genial, to his wife Martha, as they stood on the porch of a two-story brick house, nearly completed. “I want the new house for you, Martha, and I want it also, I must confess, to show the people of Collinston that Josiah Midland has been a financial success. You know life has been a struggle since I left this town a boy, and worked my way on the railroad to a place of trust. Life is not an easy thing for the best of us, and where the one gains in the race, the many are so bound by the needs of every day that they can never rise above their surroundings. I kept good habits and saved my money. I owe that teaching to my hard-working mother.”

“Yes, you have been a great success,” said the thin and careworn wife, who had shared his struggles and did not possess his buoyant temperament to throw off the wear of daily life. “I almost dread to have a house-warming, for it will cost so much and bring no end of work. I should like to have the people see our beautiful home, but you know I cannot shine in society.”

Mrs. Midland looked up to her husband as the great factor in their worldly gains, and so he was; but he owed much to the economy and good sense of the quiet woman who was glad to be his helper.

“Oh, you will shine enough, Martha, so that I shall be proud of you! After the furniture is once in the house we will invite everybody—yes, everybody, rich and poor. It’s great folly for a man to make social distinctions for himself as soon as he has a few thousands. I want to have them all enjoy the house. It’s the handsomest house in the village, and they’ll all be glad to come. The caterer will provide the supper, and you’ll just have to shake hands with the guests and look pleased.”

“What do you think I had better wear, Josiah?”

“Oh, you must have a new dress for the occasion! I like garnet. Get a garnet silk with a good deal of velvet, and you’ll look handsome;” and Mr. Midland smiled in his big-hearted way that had won him friends from his boyhood.

The new moon had risen in the west, and the stars were coming out brightly, as if all nature even was glad at Mr. Midland’s success. As they left the house the church bell rang out.

“Let us go,” said Mr. Midland. “The minister told me the other day that an evangelist was coming here. I forgot all about it, but it might pay

us to go and hear him once. Religion isn't a thing of emotion to me, but I like to hear good preaching. I've never had any notion of joining a church myself, but I don't know what the community would be without the churches. Property would go down pretty quickly."

The minister, as was human, felt the blood quicken in his veins as the successful railroad-man and his wife entered. Not that they were more important than poor people, but he knew that money consecrated to good ends is a power almost unlimited. He could only silently pray that some word would be uttered which would touch Mr. Midland's heart.

The young evangelist preached not an extraordinary sermon, but a simple talk upon the power of a good life—a life that came but once and was spent so quickly. Mr. Midland sat like one awakened out of sleep. True, he had made money; he had a good moral character; but he would go through life but once, and he was living entirely for himself. He had never realized what a wonderful gift from heaven this life is, with all its possibilities to help others, to make the poor comfortable, the sad happy, to remove the causes of crime and discontent. He seemed, all at once, to have made a voyage of discovery, and to have found a new land.

He said little on the way home, except to tell Martha that he felt strangely, and that she must go to bed and sleep, but he would sit up awhile and think. Mr. Midland did think long and carefully by the shaded lamp. He thought over his whole past experience. He had been prospered, and he owed all to a Higher Power. And after he had thought, he prayed.

In the morning he said: "Martha, I have given up the house-warming. I have decided to use the money to send a boy to college to become a preacher;" and then he added, "for a man who turns the life of another heavenward does the greatest work in the world, and I must help to do the greatest hereafter."

Mrs. Midland looked confused for a minute, and then she said, half audibly, "I am very glad, Josiah." After that night Mr. Midland's face took on an expression that was noted till his death, years afterward. It was as though he had talked with the angels, and joined a new brotherhood. The genial man became more genial, more considerate, more self-controlled. It became literally true that, like his Master, "he went about doing good." Without children of his own, he devoted his property to the giving of the Gospel to the people. He joined heartily, by voice and money, in all that elevated mankind. He built houses for the poor; he educated orphans; he held prayer-meetings in sparsely-settled districts; he labored for temperance; he became the idol and ideal man of the community. He carried out his plan of using the house-warming money to educate a young man for the ministry, and

lived to see his gift return a thousand-fold interest.

THE SECRET DOOR.

from *A Round Dozen*, by Susan Coolidge

KNOWLE, in Kent, is an ancient manor-house. It stands knee-deep in rich garden and pasture lands, with hay-fields and apple-orchards stretching beyond, and solemn oak woods which whisper and shake their wise heads when the wind blows, as though possessed of secrets which must not be spoken.

Very much as it looks to-day, it looked two hundred and thirty years ago, when Charles the First was king of England. That was the Charles who had his head cut off, you may remember. Blue Christmas smokes curled from the twisted chimneys in 1645, just as they will this year if the world lasts so long as December. The same dinnery fragrance filled the air, for good cheer smells pretty much alike in all ages and the world over. A few changes there may be--thicker trees, beds of gay flowers which were not known in that day; and where once the moat--a ditch-like stream of green water covered with weeds and scum--ran round the walls, is now a trimly cut border of verdant turf. But these changes are improvements, and in all important respects the house keeps its old look, undisturbed by modern times and ways.

In the same nursery where modern boys and girls eat, sleep, and learn their A, B, C to-day, two children lived,--little Ralph Tresham and his sister Henrietta. Quaint, old-fashioned creatures they would look to us now; but, in spite of their formal dresses and speech, they were bright and merry and happy as any children you can find among your acquaintances. Ralph's name was pronounced "Rafe," and he always called his sister "Hexie."

Christmas did not come to Knowle in its usual bright shape in 1645. Gloom and sadness and anxiety overshadowed the house; and though the little ones did not understand what the cause of the anxiety was, they felt something wrong, and went about quietly whispering to each other in corners, instead of whooping and laughing, as had been their wont. They had eaten their Christmas beef, and toasted the king in a thimbleful of wine, as usual, but their mother cried when they did so; and Joyce, the old butler, had carried off the pudding with a face like a funeral. So after dinner they crept away to the nursery, and there, by the window, began a long whispering talk. Hexie had something very exciting to tell.

"Nurse thought I was asleep," she said, "but I wasn't quite; and when they began to talk I woke up. That wasn't wrong, was it, Rafe? I couldn't sleep when I couldn't, could I?"

"I suppose not; but you needn't have listened," said Rafe, whose notions about honor were very strict.

"I did pull the pillow over my ear, but the words would get in," went on Henrietta, piteously. "And it was so interesting. Did you know that there were such creatures as Bogies, Rafe? Dorothy thinks we have got one in our house, and that its hole is in the great gallery, because once when she was there dusting the armor, she heard a queer noise in the wall, and what else could it be? It eats a great deal, does the Bogie. That's the reason nurse is sure we have got one. It ate all the cold sheep's-head yesterday, and the day before half the big pasty. No victual is safe in the larder, the Bogie has such a big appetite, nurse says."

"I remember about the sheep's-head," said Rafe, meditatively. "Almost all of it was left, and I looked to see it come in cold; but when I asked, Joyce said there was none. Cold sheep's-head is very good. Do you remember how much Humphrey used to like it?"

"I don't remember exactly, it is so long ago," replied Hexie. "How long is it, brother?--since Humphrey went away, I mean. Won't he ever come back?"

"I asked Winifred once, but she only said, 'God knew,' that nothing had been heard of him since the battle when the king was taken. He might be dead, or he might be escaped into foreign parts--and then she cried, oh, so hard, Hexie! Poor Humphrey! I hope he isn't dead. But, about the Bogie, how curious it must be to meet one! Oh, I say, let us go to the gallery now, and listen if we can hear any strange noises there. Will you?"

"Oh, Rafe! I'm afraid. I don't quite like--"

"But you can't be afraid if I'm there," said Rafe, valiantly; "besides, I'll put on Humphrey's old sword which he left behind. Then if the Bogie comes--we shall see!"

Rafe spoke like a conquering hero, Hexie thought; so, though she trembled, she made no further objection, but stood by while he lifted down the sword, helped to fasten its belt over his shoulder, and followed along the passage which led to the gallery. The heavy sword clattered and rattled as it dragged on the floor, and the sound was echoed in a ghostly way, which renewed Hexie's fears.

"Rafe! Rafe! let us go back," she cried.

"Go back yourself if you are afraid," replied Ralph, stoutly; and as going back alone through the dim passage seemed just then worse than staying where she was, Hexie stayed with her valiant brother.

Very softly they unlatched the gallery door, and stole in. It was a long, lofty apartment, panelled with cedar-wood, to which time had given

a beautiful light brown color. The ceiling, of the same wood, was carved, here and there, with shields, coats of arms, and other devices. There was little furniture: one tall cabinet, a few high-backed Dutch chairs, and some portraits hanging on the walls. The sun, not yet quite set, poured a stream of red light across the polished floor, leaving the far corners and the empty spaces formidably dusk. The children had seldom been in the gallery at this hour, and it looked to them almost like a strange place, not at all as it did at noonday when they came to jump up and down the slippery floor, and play hide-and-seek in the corners which now seemed so dark and dismal.

Even Rafe felt the difference, and shivered in spite of his bold heart and the big sword by his side. Timidly they went forward, hushing their footsteps and peering furtively into the shadows. Suddenly Hexie stopped with a little scream.

[Illustration: Close by the armor, half hidden by a curtain of heavy tapestry, was an open door.--PAGE 142.]

Close to them stood a huge suit of armor, larger and taller than a man. The empty eye-holes of the helmet glared out quite like real eyes, and the whole figure was terrible enough to frighten any little girl. But it was not at the armor that Hexie screamed; the iron man was an old friend of the children's. Many a game of hide-and-seek had they played around, and behind, and even inside him; for Humphrey had contrived a cunning way by which the figure could be taken to pieces and put together again; and more than once Rafe had been popped inside, and had lain shaking with laughter while Hexie vainly searched for him through all the gallery. This had not happened lately, for Rafe was hardly strong enough to manage by himself the screws and hinges which opened the armor; but he knew the iron man too well to scream at him, and so did Hexie. The object which excited her terror was something different, and so strange and surprising that it is no wonder she screamed.

Close by the armor, half hidden by a curtain of heavy tapestry, was an open door, where never door had been known to be. It stood ajar, and dimly visible inside was a narrow staircase winding upward.

"The hole of the Bogie!" gasped Hexie, clutching at Rafe's arm. He started, and felt for the sword. It rattled fearfully, and the sound completed Hexie's terror. She burst away, flew like a scared lapwing down the gallery, along the passages, and never stopped till she reached the nursery and her own bed, where, with two pillows and the quilt drawn over her head, she lay sobbing bitterly at the thought of Ralph left behind, to be eaten perhaps by the Bogie! Poor little Hexie!

Ralph, meanwhile, stood his ground. His heart beat very fast, but he would not run away,--that was for girls. It must be owned, however, that when a moment later the sound of muffled voices became audible down the

stairs, he trembled extremely, and was guilty of the unmanlike act of hiding behind the curtain. He was only ten years old, which must plead his excuse with bigger boys who are confident that they could never, under any circumstances, hide themselves or be afraid.

The voices drew nearer, steps sounded, and two figures came out of the narrow doorway. Could there be two Bogies? No wonder they ate so much. But in another minute all thought of Bogies vanished from Ralph's mind, for in one of the figures he recognized his own sister Winifred.

Her companion was a man. There was something familiar in his form. It moved forward, and Ralph jumped so that the big sword rattled again. Bogie number two was his brother Humphrey, mourned as dead ever since the summer before, when so many brave gentlemen gave up their lives for King Charles at the battle of Naseby.

"What noise was that?" whispered Winifred, fearfully.

"Some sound from below," replied Humphrey, after listening a moment. "Must you go, Winnie?"

"I must, dear Humphrey. I dare not absent myself longer lest I be missed and suspected. Oh, if to-morrow were but over, and you safe on the French lugger and over the sea! I cannot breathe while this hiding and danger go on."

"I suppose I ought to be glad also," said Humphrey, ruefully; "but to me that French lugger means exile, and loneliness, and poverty, for the rest of my life, perhaps. Better have laid down my life with the rest at Naseby, in striking one last blow for the king."

"Don't, don't speak so!" protested Winifred, tearfully. "You are alive, thank God; and once these wars are over we may rejoin you, and have a happy home somewhere, if not in the land of our fathers. Now, dear Humphrey, have you all you need for the night?"

"Christmas cheer," said Humphrey, in a would-be cheerful voice. "Beef and ale,--what better fare could be? You are a gallant provider, my Winnie, and there is need, for since I have lain in that hole with nothing else to do, my appetite has raged like a wolf. That sheep's-head was wondrous savory. I say though, Winnie, what do the servants think of the famine I create in the larder?"

"Oh, the stupid things fancy that a Bogie has taken up his residence here. A very hungry Bogie, Joyce calls the creature!"

The brother and sister laughed; then they kissed each other.

"Good-night, dearest Winifred."

"Good-night, brother." And Humphrey vanished up the stairs. Winifred lingered a moment; then, as if remembering something, opened the door again and ran after him. Ralph marked that she laid her hand on a particular boss in the carved wainscot, and pressed it in hard, whereon the door sprang open. He stole out, laid his hand on the same boss, and felt the spring give way under his touch. Some undefined idea of stealing in later, to make Humphrey a visit, was in his head; but he heard Winifred returning, and hurried out of the gallery. Putting back the sword in its place, he entered the nursery. No Hexie was visible, but a sobbing sound drew his attention to a tumbled heap on the bed.

"Is that you, Hexie? Why, what are you crying about?" pulling away the pillow, which she held tight.

"Oh, Rafe! Then the Bogie didn't eat you, after all!" And Hexie buried her tear-stained face in his shoulder.

"Bogie! Nonsense! There are no such things as Bogies!"

"What was it, then, that lived up that dreadful stairs?"

"I can't tell you; only it was nothing at all dreadful. And, Hexie, don't say a word about that door to any one, will you? It might make great trouble if you did."

"I did tell Deborah, when she fetched the candle and asked why I cried, that I saw a strange door in the gallery," faltered Hexie, truthful, though penitent.

"Oh! Hexie, how could you? I don't like Deborah, and her father is a crop-eared knave. Humphrey said so one day. How could you talk to her about the door, Hexie?"

"I--don't know. I was frightened, and she asked me," sobbed Hexie.
"Will it do any harm, Rafe?"

"It may," said Rafe, gloomily. "But don't cry, Hexie. You meant no harm, at all events."

"Oh, don't speak so gravely and so like Joyce," said Hexie, much troubled. She cried herself to sleep that night. Deborah, who undressed her, asked many questions about the gallery and the door.

"It was very dark, and perhaps I mistook,"--that was all Hexie could be made to say. Ralph was disturbed and wakeful, and slept later than usual next morning. He jumped up in a hurry and made what haste he could with dressing and breakfast, but it seemed as though they never took so much time before; and all the while he ate he was conscious of a stir and

bustle in the house, which excited his curiosity very much.
Knocking--the sound of feet--something unusual was going on.

As soon as possible he slipped away from nurse and ran to the gallery. The door was half open. He looked in, and stood still with terror. Men in brown uniforms and steel caps were there sounding the walls and tapping the floor-boards with staves. The gallery seemed full of them, though when Rafe counted there were but five.

"This man of iron was, in all likelihood, a Malignant also," he heard one of them say, striking the armor with his fist.

"He is somewhat old for that. Methinks that is armor of the time of that man of blood, Harry the Eighth. Move it aside, Jotham, that we may search the farther panel."

So the heavy figure was thrust into a corner, and the men went on tapping with their wands. Rafe groaned within himself when he heard them declare that the wall sounded hollow, and saw them searching for a spring. Twenty times it seemed as though they must have lighted on the right place. Twenty times they just missed it.

"We were ill advised to come without tools," declared the man who seemed leader of the party. "Come thou to my shop, Peter Kettle, and thou, Bartimeus and Zerubbabel, and we will fetch such things as are needful. Jotham, stay thou here, to see that no man escapeth from the concealment behind the wall."

So four of the men went away, leaving Jotham striding up and down as on guard. Presently came a shout from beneath the window,--

"Jotham! our leader hath dropped his pouch in which are the keys of the smithy. Hasten and bring it to the outer door."

"Aye, aye!" answered Jotham, and, pouch in hand, he ran down the stairs. Now was Rafe's opportunity. Like a flash he was across the gallery, his hand on the boss. The door flew open, and he fell into the arms of Humphrey, who, sword in hand and teeth set, stood on the lower step of the staircase, prepared to sell his liberty as dearly as possible.

"Rafe! little Rafe!" he exclaimed.

"Hush! The man will come back," panted Rafe. "Come away--hide--oh, where?" Then with a sudden inspiration he dragged his brother toward the iron man. "Get inside," he cried. "They will never think of searching there! Oh, Humphrey--make haste! Get inside!"

There was no time to be lost. With the speed of desperation, Humphrey unscrewed, lifted, stepped inside the armor. Rafe slipped the fastenings

together, whispered "Shut your eyes," and flew back to his hiding-place. Just in time, for Jotham's step was on the stair, and next moment he entered the gallery, and resumed his march up and down, little dreaming that the man sought for was peeping through the helmet holes at him, not three feet away.

Presently the other soldiers came back with hammers and wrenches, and in a short time the beautiful wainscot, split into pieces, lay on the floor. Suddenly there was a shout. The secret door had flown open, and the staircase stood revealed. Four of the men, with pikes and pistols, prepared to ascend, while the fifth guarded the opening below.

At that moment Winifred entered the gallery from the farther end. She turned deadly pale when she saw the open door and the men.

"Oh! Heaven have mercy!" she cried, and dropped half fainting into a chair.

Rafe darted across the floor and seized her hand.

"Hush," he whispered. "Don't say a word, sister. _He_ is safe."

"He? Who?" cried the amazed Winifred.

But now voices sounded from above. The men were coming down. Winifred rallied her courage, rose, and went forward. She was very white still, but she spoke in a steady voice. Her two brothers, Humphrey in his hiding-place and little Rafe by her side, both admired her greatly.

"What is the meaning of this, Jotham Green?" she demanded. "By what warrant do you enter and spoil our house?"

"By the warrant which all true men have to search for traitors," said Jotham.

"You will find none such here," responded Winifred, firmly.

"We find the lurking-place in which one such has doubtless lain," said Zerubbabel. "Where holes exist, look out for vermin."

"You are less than civil, neighbor. An old house like this has many strange nooks and corners of which the inhabitants may have neither use nor knowledge. If your search is done, I will beg you to make good the damage you have caused as best you may, and with as little noise as possible, that my mother be not alarmed. Jotham Green, you are a good workman, I know. I recollect how deftly you once repaired that cabinet for us."

All the men knew Winifred, and her calm and decided manner made its

impression. Jotham slowly picked up the fragments of the panelling and began to fit them together. The rest consulted, and at last rather sheepishly, and with a muttered half apology about "wrong information," went away, taking with them the injured woodwork, which Jotham undertook to repair. Rafe's first words after they disappeared were,--

"Winifred, you must dismiss Deborah. It is she that has betrayed us."

"How do you know that, Rafe?"

Then it all came out. Winifred listened to the tale with streaming tears.

"Oh, Rafe, my darling, how brave you were! You played the man for us to-day, and have saved--I trust you have saved--our Humphrey. The men will not return to-day, and to-night the lugger sails."

And Humphrey was saved. Before morning, well disguised, he had made his way across country to a little fishing-port, embarked, and reached France without further accident.

So that strange Christmas adventure ended happily. It was all long, long ago. Humphrey and Winifred and Rafe lived their lives out, and lay down to rest a century and a half since under the daisy-sprinkled English sod. Little Hexie died an aged woman, before any of us was born. But still the beautiful old manor-house stands amid its gardens and pasture lands, with the silvery look of time on its gray walls. Still the armed figure keeps guard beside the secret staircase, the tapestry hangs in the old heavy folds, evening reddens the cedar walls and the polished floor, and everything occupies the same place and wears the same look that it did when little Rafe played the man in that gallery, and saved his brother Humphrey, more than two hundred years ago.

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THE KITCHEN SIDE OF THE DOOR
from Buttered Side Down, by Edna Ferber

The City was celebrating New Year's Eve. Spelled thus, with a capital C, know it can mean but New York. In the Pink Fountain room of the Newest Hotel all those grand old forms and customs handed down to us for the occasion were being rigidly observed in all their original quaintness. The Van Dyked man who looked like a Russian Grand Duke (he really was a chiropodist) had drunk champagne out of the pink satin slipper of the lady who behaved like an actress (she was forelady at Schmaus' Wholesale Millinery, eighth floor). The two respectable married ladies there in the corner had been kissed by each other's husbands. The slim, Puritan-faced woman in white, with her black hair so demurely parted and coiled in a sleek knot, had risen suddenly from her place and walked indolently to the edge of the plashing pink fountain in the center of the room, had stood contemplating its shallows with a dreamy half-smile on

her lips, and then had lifted her slim legs slowly and gracefully over its fern-fringed basin and had waded into its chilling midst, trailing her exquisite white satin and chiffon draperies after her, and scaring the goldfish into fits. The loudest scream of approbation had come from the yellow-haired, loose-lipped youth who had made the wager, and lost it. The heavy blonde in the inevitable violet draperies showed signs of wanting to dance on the table. Her companion--a structure made up of layer upon layer, and fold upon fold of flabby tissue--knew all the waiters by their right names, and insisted on singing with the orchestra and beating time with a rye roll. The clatter of dishes was giving way to the clink of glasses.

In the big, bright kitchen back, of the Pink Fountain room Miss Gussie Fink sat at her desk, calm, watchful, insolent-eyed, a goddess sitting in judgment. On the pay roll of the Newest Hotel Miss Gussie Fink's name appeared as kitchen checker, but her regular job was goddressing. Her altar was a high desk in a corner of the busy kitchen, and it was an altar of incense, of burnt-offerings, and of showbread. Inexorable as a goddess of the ancients was Miss Fink, and ten times as difficult to appease. For this is the rule of the Newest Hotel, that no waiter may carry his laden tray restaurantward until its contents have been viewed and duly checked by the eye and hand of Miss Gussie Fink, or her assistants. Flat upon the table must go every tray, off must go each silver dish-cover, lifted must be each napkin to disclose its treasure of steaming corn or hot rolls. Clouds of incense rose before Miss Gussie Fink and she sniffed it unmoved, her eyes, beneath level brows, regarding savory broiler or cunning ice with equal indifference, appraising alike lobster cocktail or onion soup, traveling from blue points to brie. Things a la and things glace were all one to her. Gazing at food was Miss Gussie Fink's occupation, and just to see the way she regarded a boneless squab made you certain that she never ate.

In spite of the I-don't-know-how-many (see ads) New Year's Eve diners for whom food was provided that night, the big, busy kitchen was the most orderly, shining, spotless place imaginable. But Miss Gussie Fink was the neatest, most immaculate object in all that great, clean room. There was that about her which suggested daisies in a field, if you know what I mean. This may have been due to the fact that her eyes were brown while her hair was gold, or it may have been something about the way her collars fitted high, and tight, and smooth, or the way her close white sleeves came down to meet her pretty hands, or the way her shining hair sprang from her forehead. Also the smooth creaminess of her clear skin may have had something to do with it. But privately, I think it was due to the way she wore her shirtwaists. Miss Gussie Fink could wear a starched white shirtwaist under a close-fitting winter coat, remove the coat, run her right forefinger along her collar's edge and her left thumb along the back of her belt and disclose to the admiring world a blouse as unwrinkled and unsullied as though it had just come from her own skilful hands at the ironing board. Miss Gussie Fink was so innately,

flagrantly, beautifully clean-looking that--well, there must be a stop to this description.

She was the kind of girl you'd like to see behind the counter of your favorite delicatessen, knowing that you need not shudder as her fingers touch your Sunday night supper slices of tongue, and Swiss cheese, and ham. No girl had ever dreamed of refusing to allow Gussie to borrow her chamois for a second.

To-night Miss Fink had come on at 10 P.M., which was just two hours later than usual. She knew that she was to work until 6 A.M., which may have accounted for the fact that she displayed very little of what the fans call ginger as she removed her hat and coat and hung them on the hook behind the desk. The prospect of that all-night, eight-hour stretch may have accounted for it, I say. But privately, and *entre nous*, it didn't. For here you must know of Heiny. Heiny, alas! now Henri.

Until two weeks ago Henri had been Heiny and Miss Fink had been Kid. When Henri had been Heiny he had worked in the kitchen at many things, but always with a loving eye on Miss Gussie Fink. Then one wild night there had been a waiters' strike--wages or hours or tips or all three. In the confusion that followed Heiny had been pressed into service and a chopped coat. He had fitted into both with unbelievable nicety, proving that waiters are born, not made. Those little tricks and foibles that are characteristic of the genus waiter seemed to envelop him as though a fairy garment had fallen upon his shoulders. The folded napkin under his left arm seemed to have been placed there by nature, so perfectly did it fit into place. The ghostly tread, the little whisking skip, the half-simper, the deferential bend that had in it at the same time something of insolence, all were there; the very "Yes, miss," and "Very good, sir," rose automatically and correctly to his untrained lips. Cinderella rising resplendent from her ash-strewn hearth was not more completely transformed than Heiny in his role of Henri. And with the transformation Miss Gussie Fink had been left behind her desk disconsolate.

Kitchens are as quick to seize upon these things and gossip about them as drawing rooms are. And because Miss Gussie Fink had always worn a little air of aloofness to all except Heiny, the kitchen was the more eager to make the most of its morsel. Each turned it over under his tongue--Tony, the Crook, whom Miss Fink had scorned; Francois, the entree cook, who often forgot he was married; Miss Sweeney, the bar-checker, who was jealous of Miss Fink's complexion. Miss Fink heard, and said nothing. She only knew that there would be no dear figure waiting for her when the night's work was done. For two weeks now she had put on her hat and coat and gone her way at one o'clock alone. She discovered that to be taken home night after night under Heiny's tender escort had taught her a ridiculous terror of the streets at night now that she was without protection. Always the short walk from the car to the flat where Miss

Fink lived with her mother had been a glorious, star-lit, all too brief moment. Now it was an endless and terrifying trial, a thing of shivers and dread, fraught with horror of passing the alley just back of Cassidey's buffet. There had even been certain little half-serious, half-jesting talks about the future into which there had entered the subject of a little delicatessen and restaurant in a desirable neighborhood, with Heiny in the kitchen, and a certain blonde, neat, white-shirtwaisted person in charge of the desk and front shop.

She and her mother had always gone through a little formula upon Miss Fink's return from work. They never used it now. Gussie's mother was a real mother--the kind that wakes up when you come home.

"That you, Gussie?" Ma Fink would call from the bedroom, at the sound of the key in the lock.

"It's me, ma."

"Heiny bring you home?"

"Sure," happily.

"There's a bit of sausage left, and some pie if----"

"Oh, I ain't hungry. We stopped at Joey's downtown and had a cup of coffee and a ham on rye. Did you remember to put out the milk bottle?"

For two weeks there had been none of that. Gussie had learned to creep silently into bed, and her mother, being a mother, feigned sleep.

To-night at her desk Miss Gussie Fink seemed a shade cooler, more self-contained, and daisylike than ever. From somewhere at the back of her head she could see that Heiny was avoiding her desk and was using the services of the checker at the other end of the room. And even as the poison of this was eating into her heart she was tapping her forefinger imperatively on the desk before her and saying to Tony, the Crook:

"Down on the table with that tray, Tony--flat. This may be a busy little New Year's Eve, but you can't come any of your sleight-of-hand stuff on me." For Tony had a little trick of concealing a dollar-and-a-quarter sirloin by the simple method of slapping the platter close to the underside of his tray and holding it there with long, lean fingers outspread, the entire bit of knavery being concealed in the folds of a flowing white napkin in the hand that balanced the tray. Into Tony's eyes there came a baleful gleam. His lean jaw jutted out threateningly.

"You're the real Weissenheimer kid, ain't you?" he sneered. "Never mind. I'll get you at recess."

"Some day," drawled Miss Fink, checking the steak, "the house'll get wise to your stuff and then you'll have to go back to the coal wagon. I know so much about you it's beginning to make me uncomfortable. I hate to carry around a burden of crime."

"You're a sorehead because Heiny turned you down and now----"

"Move on there!" snapped Miss Fink, "or I'll call the steward to settle you. Maybe he'd be interested to know that you've been counting in the date and your waiter's number, and adding 'em in at the bottom of your check."

Tony, the Crook, turned and skimmed away toward the dining-room, but the taste of victory was bitter in Miss Fink's mouth.

Midnight struck. There came from the direction of the Pink Fountain Room a clamor and din which penetrated the thickness of the padded doors that separated the dining-room from the kitchen beyond. The sound rose and swelled above the blare of the orchestra. Chairs scraped on the marble floor as hundreds rose to their feet. The sound of clinking glasses became as the jangling of a hundred bells. There came the sharp spat of hand-clapping, then cheers, yells, huzzas. Through the swinging doors at the end of the long passageway Miss Fink could catch glimpses of dazzling color, of shimmering gowns, of bare arms uplifted, of flowers, and plumes, and jewels, with the rosy light of the famed pink fountain casting a gracious glow over all. Once she saw a tall young fellow throw his arm about the shoulder of a glorious creature at the next table, and though the door swung shut before she could see it, Miss Fink knew that he had kissed her.

There were no New Year's greetings in the kitchen back of the Pink Fountain Room. It was the busiest moment in all that busy night. The heat of the ovens was so intense that it could be felt as far as Miss Fink's remote corner. The swinging doors between dining-room and kitchen were never still. A steady stream of waiters made for the steam tables before which the white-clad chefs stood ladling, carving, basting, serving, gave their orders, received them, stopped at the checking-desk, and sped dining-roomward again. Tony, the Crook, was cursing at one of the little Polish vegetable girls who had not been quick enough about the garnishing of a salad, and she was saying, over and over again, in her thick tongue:

"Aw, shod op yur mout'!"

The thud-thud of Miss Fink's checking-stamp kept time to flying footsteps, but even as her practised eye swept over the tray before her she saw the steward direct Henri toward her desk, just as he was about to head in the direction of the minor checking-desk. Beneath downcast lids she saw him coming. There was about Henri to-night a certain radiance, a

sort of electrical elasticity, so nimble, so tireless, so exuberant was he. In the eyes of Miss Gussie Fink he looked heartbreakingly handsome in his waiter's uniform--handsome, distinguished, remote, and infinitely desirable. And just behind him, revenge in his eye, came Tony.

The flat surface of the desk received Henri's tray. Miss Fink regarded it with a cold and business-like stare. Henri whipped his napkin from under his left arm and began to remove covers, dexterously. Off came the first silver, dome-shaped top.

"Guinea hen," said Henri.

"I seen her lookin' at you when you served the little necks," came from Tony, as though continuing a conversation begun in some past moment of pause, "and she's some lovely doll, believe me."

Miss Fink scanned the guinea hen thoroughly, but with a detached air, and selected the proper stamp from the box at her elbow. Thump! On the broad pasteboard sheet before her appeared the figures \$1.75 after Henri's number.

"Think so?" grinned Henri, and removed another cover. "One candied sweets."

"I bet some day we'll see you in the Sunday papers, Heiny," went on Tony, "with a piece about handsome waiter runnin' away with beautiful s'ciety girl. Say; you're too perfect even for a waiter."

Thump! Thirty cents.

"Quit your kiddin'," said the flattered Henri. "One endive, French dressing."

Thump! "Next!" said Miss Fink, dispassionately, yawned, and smiled fleetingly at the entree cook who wasn't looking her way. Then, as Tony slid his tray toward her: "How's business, Tony? H'm? How many two-bit cigar bands have you slipped onto your own private collection of nickel straights and made a twenty-cent rake-off?"

But there was a mist in the bright brown eyes as Tony the Crook turned away with his tray. In spite of the satisfaction of having had the last word, Miss Fink knew in her heart that Tony had "got her at recess," as he had said he would.

Things were slowing up for Miss Fink. The stream of hurrying waiters was turned in the direction of the kitchen bar now. From now on the eating would be light, and the drinking heavy. Miss Fink, with time hanging heavy, found herself blinking down at the figures stamped on the pasteboard sheet before her, and in spite of the blinking, two marks that

never were intended for a checker's report splashed down just over the \$1.75 after Henri's number. A lovely doll! And she had gazed at Heiny. Well, that was to be expected. No woman could gaze unmoved upon Heiny. "A lovely doll--"

"Hi, Miss Fink!" it was the steward's voice. "We need you over in the bar to help Miss Sweeney check the drinks. They're coming too swift for her. The eating will be light from now on; just a little something salty now and then."

So Miss Fink dabbed covertly at her eyes and betook herself out of the atmosphere of roasting, and broiling, and frying, and stewing; away from the sight of great copper kettles, and glowing coals and hissing pans, into a little world fragrant with mint, breathing of orange and lemon peel, perfumed with pineapple, redolent of cinnamon and clove, reeking with things spirituous. Here the splutter of the broiler was replaced by the hiss of the siphon, and the pop-pop of corks, and the tinkle and clink of ice against glass.

"Hello, dearie!" cooed Miss Sweeney, in greeting, staring hard at the suspicious redness around Miss Fink's eyelids. "Ain't you sweet to come over here in the headache department and help me out! Here's the wine list. You'll prob'ly need it. Say, who do you suppose invented New Year's Eve? They must of had a imagination like a Greek 'bus boy. I'm limp as a rag now, and it's only two-thirty. I've got a regular cramp in my wrist from checkin' quarts. Say, did you hear about Heiny's crowd?"

"No," said Miss Fink, evenly, and began to study the first page of the wine list under the heading "Champagnes of Noted Vintages."

"Well," went on Miss Sweeney's little thin, malicious voice, "he's fell in soft. There's a table of three, and they're drinkin' 1874 Imperial Crown at twelve dollars per, like it was Waukesha ale. And every time they finish a bottle one of the guys pays for it with a brand new ten and a brand new five and tells Heiny to keep the change. Can you beat it?"

"I hope," said Miss Fink, pleasantly, "that the supply of 1874 will hold out till morning. I'd hate to see them have to come down to ten dollar wine. Here you, Tony! Come back here! I may be a new hand in this department but I'm not so green that you can put a gold label over on me as a yellow label. Notice that I'm checking you another fifty cents."

"Ain't he the grafter!" laughed Miss Sweeney. She leaned toward Miss Fink and lowered her voice discreetly. "Though I'll say this for'm. If you let him get away with it now an' then, he'll split even with you. H'm? O, well, now, don't get so high and mighty. The management expects it in this department. That's why they pay starvation wages."

An unusual note of color crept into Miss Gussie Fink's smooth cheek. It

deepened and glowed as Heiny darted around the corner and up to the bar. There was about him an air of suppressed excitement--suppressed, because Heiny was too perfect a waiter to display emotion.

"Not another!" chanted the bartenders, in chorus.

"Yes," answered Henri, solemnly, and waited while the wine cellar was made to relinquish another rare jewel.

"O, you Heiny!" called Miss Sweeney, "tell us what she looks like. If I had time I'd take a peek myself. From what Tony says she must look something like Maxine Elliot, only brighter."

Henri turned. He saw Miss Fink. A curious little expression came into his eyes--a Heiny look, it might have been called, as he regarded his erstwhile sweetheart's unruffled attire, and clear skin, and steady eye and glossy hair. She was looking past him in that baffling, maddening way that angry women have. Some of Henri's poise seemed to desert him in that moment. He appeared a shade less debonair as he received the precious bottle from the wine man's hands. He made for Miss Fink's desk and stood watching her while she checked his order. At the door he turned and looked over his shoulder at Miss Sweeney.

"Some time," he said, deliberately, "when there's no ladies around, I'll tell you what I think she looks like."

And the little glow of color in Miss Gussic Fink's smooth cheek became a crimson flood that swept from brow to throat.

"Oh, well," snickered Miss Sweeney, to hide her own discomfiture, "this is little Heiny's first New Year's Eve in the dining-room. Honest, I b'lieve he's shocked. He don't realize that celebratin' New Year's Eve is like eatin' oranges. You got to let go your dignity t' really enjoy 'em."

Three times more did Henri enter and demand a bottle of the famous vintage, and each time he seemed a shade less buoyant. His elation diminished as his tips grew greater until, as he drew up at the bar at six o'clock, he seemed wrapped in impenetrable gloom.

"Them hawgs sousin' yet?" shrilled Miss Sweeney. She and Miss Fink had climbed down from their high stools, and were preparing to leave. Henri nodded, drearily, and disappeared in the direction of the Pink Fountain Room.

Miss Fink walked back to her own desk in the corner near the dining-room door. She took her hat off the hook, and stood regarding it, thoughtfully. Then, with a little air of decision, she turned and walked swiftly down the passageway that separated dining-room from kitchen.

Tillie, the scrub-woman, was down on her hands and knees in one corner of the passage. She was one of a small army of cleaners that had begun the work of clearing away the debris of the long night's revel. Miss Fink lifted her neat skirts high as she tip-toed through the little soapy pool that followed in the wake of Tillie, the scrub-woman. She opened the swinging doors a cautious little crack and peered in. What she saw was not pretty. If the words sordid and bacchanalian had been part of Miss Fink's vocabulary they would have risen to her lips then. The crowd had gone. The great room contained not more than half a dozen people. Confetti littered the floor. Here and there a napkin, crushed and bedraggled into an unrecognizable ball, lay under a table. From an overturned bottle the dregs were dripping drearily. The air was stale, stifling, poisonous.

At a little table in the center of the room Henri's three were still drinking. They were doing it in a dreadful and businesslike way. There were two men and one woman. The faces of all three were mahogany colored and expressionless. There was about them an awful sort of stillness. Something in the sight seemed to sicken Gussie Fink. It came to her that the wintry air outdoors must be gloriously sweet, and cool, and clean in contrast to this. She was about to turn away, with a last look at Heiny yawning behind his hand, when suddenly the woman rose unsteadily to her feet, balancing herself with her finger tips on the table. She raised her head and stared across the room with dull, unseeing eyes, and licked her lips with her tongue. Then she turned and walked half a dozen paces, screamed once with horrible shrillness, and crashed to the floor. She lay there in a still, crumpled heap, the folds of her exquisite gown rippling to meet a little stale pool of wine that had splashed from some broken glass. Then this happened. Three people ran toward the woman on the floor, and two people ran past her and out of the room. The two who ran away were the men with whom she had been drinking, and they were not seen again. The three who ran toward her were Henri, the waiter, Miss Gussie Fink, checker, and Tillie, the scrub-woman. Henri and Miss Fink reached her first. Tillie, the scrub-woman, was a close third. Miss Gussie Fink made as though to slip her arm under the poor bruised head, but Henri caught her wrist fiercely (for a waiter) and pulled her to her feet almost roughly.

"You leave her alone, Kid," he commanded.

Miss Gussie Fink stared, indignation choking her utterance. And as she stared the fierce light in Henri's eyes was replaced by the light of tenderness.

"We'll tend to her," said Henri; "she ain't fit for you to touch. I wouldn't let you soil your hands on such truck." And while Gussie still stared he grasped the unconscious woman by the shoulders, while another waiter grasped her ankles, with Tillie, the scrub-woman, arranging her draperies pityingly around her, and together they carried her out of the

dining-room to a room beyond.

Back in the kitchen Miss Gussie Fink was preparing to don her hat, but she was experiencing some difficulty because of the way in which her fingers persisted in trembling. Her face was turned away from the swinging doors, but she knew when Henri came in. He stood just behind her, in silence. When she turned to face him she found Henri looking at her, and as he looked all the Heiny in him came to the surface and shone in his eyes. He looked long and silently at Miss Gussie Fink--at the sane, simple, wholesomeness of her, at her clear brown eyes, at her white forehead from which the shining hair sprang away in such a delicate line, at her immaculately white shirtwaist, and her smooth, snug-fitting collar that came up to the lobes of her little pink ears, at her creamy skin, at her trim belt. He looked as one who would rest his eyes--eyes weary of gazing upon satins, and jewels, and rouge, and carmine, and white arms, and bosoms.

"Gee, Kid! You look good to me," he said.

"Do I--Heiny?" whispered Miss Fink.

"Believe me!" replied Heiny, fervently. "It was just a case of swelled head. Forget it, will you? Say, that gang in there to-night--why, say, that gang----"

"I know," interrupted Miss Fink.

"Going home?" asked Heiny.

"Yes."

"Suppose we have a bite of something to eat first," suggested Heiny.

Miss Fink glanced round the great, deserted kitchen. As she gazed a little expression of disgust wrinkled her pretty nose--the nose that perforce had sniffed the scent of so many rare and exquisite dishes.

"Sure," she assented, joyously, "but not here. Let's go around the corner to Joey's. I could get real chummy with a cup of good hot coffee and a ham on rye."

He helped her on with her coat, and if his hands rested a moment on her shoulders who was there to see it? A few sleepy, wan-eyed waiters and Tillie, the scrub-woman. Together they started toward the door. Tillie, the scrubwoman, had worked her wet way out of the passage and into the kitchen proper. She and her pail blocked their way. She was sopping up a soapy pool with an all-encompassing gray scrub-rag. Heiny and Gussie stopped a moment perforce to watch her. It was rather fascinating to see how that artful scrub-rag craftily closed in upon the soapy pool until it

engulfed it. Tillie sat back on her knees to wring out the water-soaked rag. There was something pleasing in the sight. Tillie's blue calico was faded white in patches and at the knees it was dark with soapy water. Her shoes were turned up ludicrously at the toes, as scrub-women's shoes always are. Tillie's thin hair was wadded back into a moist knob at the back and skewered with a gray-black hairpin. From her parboiled, shriveled fingers to her ruddy, perspiring face there was nothing of grace or beauty about Tillie. And yet Heiny found something pleasing there. He could not have told you why, so how can I, unless to say that it was, perhaps, for much the same reason that we rejoice in the wholesome, safe, reassuring feel of the gray woolen blanket on our bed when we wake from a horrid dream.

"A Happy New Year to you," said Heiny gravely, and took his hand out of his pocket.

Tillie's moist right hand closed over something. She smiled so that one saw all her broken black teeth.

"The same t' you," said Tillie. "The same t' you."

THE BOARDING HOUSE

from *Dubliners*, by James Joyce

MRS. MOONEY was a butcher's daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman. She had married her father's foreman and opened a butcher's shop near Spring Gardens. But as soon as his father-in-law was dead Mr. Mooney began to go to the devil. He drank, plundered the till, ran headlong into debt. It was no use making him take the pledge: he was sure to break out again a few days after. By fighting his wife in the presence of customers and by buying bad meat he ruined his business. One night he went for his wife with the cleaver and she had to sleep a neighbour's house.

After that they lived apart. She went to the priest and got a separation from him with care of the children. She would give him neither money nor food nor house-room; and so he was obliged to enlist himself as a sheriff's man. He was a shabby stooped little drunkard with a white face and a white moustache white eyebrows, pencilled above his little eyes, which were veined and raw; and all day long he sat in the bailiff's room, waiting to be put on a job. Mrs. Mooney, who had taken what remained of her money out of the butcher business and set up a boarding house in Hardwicke Street, was a big imposing woman. Her house had a floating population made up of tourists from Liverpool and the Isle of Man and, occasionally, artistes from the music halls. Its resident population was made up of clerks from the city. She governed the house cunningly and firmly, knew when to give credit, when to be stern and when to let things pass. All the resident young men spoke of her as The Madam.

Mrs. Mooney's young men paid fifteen shillings a week for board and lodgings (beer or stout at dinner excluded). They shared in common tastes and occupations and for this reason they were very chummy with one another. They discussed with one another the chances of favourites and outsiders. Jack Mooney, the Madam's son, who was clerk to a commission agent in Fleet Street, had the reputation of being a hard case. He was fond of using soldiers' obscenities: usually he came home in the small hours. When he met his friends he had always a good one to tell them and he was always sure to be on to a good thing-that is to say, a likely horse or a likely artiste. He was also handy with the mits and sang comic songs. On Sunday nights there would often be a reunion in Mrs. Mooney's front drawing-room. The music-hall artistes would oblige; and Sheridan played waltzes and polkas and vamped accompaniments. Polly Mooney, the Madam's daughter, would also sing. She sang:

I'm a ... naughty girl.
You needn't sham:
You know I am.

Polly was a slim girl of nineteen; she had light soft hair and a small full mouth. Her eyes, which were grey with a shade of green through them, had a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a little perverse madonna. Mrs. Mooney had first sent her daughter to be a typist in a corn-factor's office but, as a disreputable sheriff's man used to come every other day to the office, asking to be allowed to say a word to his daughter, she had taken her daughter home again and set her to do housework. As Polly was very lively the intention was to give her the run of the young men. Besides young men like to feel that there is a young woman not very far away. Polly, of course, flirted with the young men but Mrs. Mooney, who was a shrewd judge, knew that the young men were only passing the time away: none of them meant business. Things went on so for a long time and Mrs. Mooney began to think of sending Polly back to typewriting when she noticed that something was going on between Polly and one of the young men. She watched the pair and kept her own counsel.

Polly knew that she was being watched, but still her mother's persistent silence could not be misunderstood. There had been no open complicity between mother and daughter, no open understanding but, though people in the house began to talk of the affair, still Mrs. Mooney did not intervene. Polly began to grow a little strange in her manner and the young man was evidently perturbed. At last, when she judged it to be the right moment, Mrs. Mooney intervened. She dealt with moral problems as a cleaver deals with meat: and in this case she had made up her mind.

It was a bright Sunday morning of early summer, promising heat, but with a fresh breeze blowing. All the windows of the boarding house were open and the lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes. The belfry of George's Church sent out constant peals and worshippers, singly or in groups, traversed the little circus before the church, revealing their purpose by their self-contained demeanour no less than by the little volumes in their gloved hands. Breakfast was over in the boarding house and the table of the breakfast-room was covered with plates on which lay yellow streaks of eggs with morsels of bacon-fat and bacon-rind. Mrs. Mooney sat in the straw arm-chair and watched the servant Mary remove the breakfast things. She had Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help to make Tuesday's bread-pudding. When the table was cleared, the broken bread collected, the sugar and butter safe under lock and key, she

began to reconstruct the interview which she had had the night before with Polly. Things were as she had suspected: she had been frank in her questions and Polly had been frank in her answers. Both had been somewhat awkward, of course. She had been made awkward by her not wishing to receive the news in too cavalier a fashion or to seem to have connived and Polly had been made awkward not merely because allusions of that kind always made her awkward but also because she did not wish it to be thought that in her wise innocence she had divined the intention behind her mother's tolerance.

Mrs. Mooney glanced instinctively at the little gilt clock on the mantelpiece as soon as she had become aware through her reverie that the bells of George's Church had stopped ringing. It was seventeen minutes past eleven: she would have lots of time to have the matter out with Mr. Doran and then catch short twelve at Marlborough Street. She was sure she would win. To begin with she had all the weight of social opinion on her side: she was an outraged mother. She had allowed him to live beneath her roof, assuming that he was a man of honour and he had simply abused her hospitality. He was thirty-four or thirty-five years of age, so that youth could not be pleaded as his excuse; nor could ignorance be his excuse since he was a man who had seen something of the world. He had simply taken advantage of Polly's youth and inexperience: that was evident. The question was: What reparation would he make?

There must be reparation made in such case. It is all very well for the man: he can go his ways as if nothing had happened, having had his moment of pleasure, but the girl has to bear the brunt. Some mothers would be content to patch up such an affair for a sum of money; she had known cases of it. But she would not do so. For her only one reparation could make up for the loss of her daughter's honour: marriage.

She counted all her cards again before sending Mary up to Doran's room to say that she wished to speak with him. She felt sure she would win. He was a serious young man, not rakish or loud-voiced like the others. If it had been Mr. Sheridan or Mr. Meade or Bantam Lyons her task would have been much harder. She did not think he would face publicity. All the lodgers in the house knew something of the affair; details had been invented by some. Besides, he had been employed for thirteen years in a great Catholic wine-merchant's office and publicity would mean for him, perhaps, the loss of his job. Whereas if he agreed all might be well. She knew he had a good screw for one thing and she suspected he had a bit of stuff put by.

Nearly the half-hour! She stood up and surveyed herself in the

pier-glass. The decisive expression of her great florid face satisfied her and she thought of some mothers she knew who could not get their daughters off their hands.

Mr. Doran was very anxious indeed this Sunday morning. He had made two attempts to shave but his hand had been so unsteady that he had been obliged to desist. Three days' reddish beard fringed his jaws and every two or three minutes a mist gathered on his glasses so that he had to take them off and polish them with his pocket-handkerchief. The recollection of his confession of the night before was a cause of acute pain to him; the priest had drawn out every ridiculous detail of the affair and in the end had so magnified his sin that he was almost thankful at being afforded a loophole of reparation. The harm was done. What could he do now but marry her or run away? He could not brazen it out. The affair would be sure to be talked of and his employer would be certain to hear of it. Dublin is such a small city: everyone knows everyone else's business. He felt his heart leap warmly in his throat as he heard in his excited imagination old Mr. Leonard calling out in his rasping voice: "Send Mr. Doran here, please."

All his long years of service gone for nothing! All his industry and diligence thrown away! As a young man he had sown his wild oats, of course; he had boasted of his free-thinking and denied the existence of God to his companions in public-houses. But that was all passed and done with... nearly. He still bought a copy of Reynolds's Newspaper every week but he attended to his religious duties and for nine-tenths of the year lived a regular life. He had money enough to settle down on; it was not that. But the family would look down on her. First of all there was her disreputable father and then her mother's boarding house was beginning to get a certain fame. He had a notion that he was being had. He could imagine his friends talking of the affair and laughing. She was a little vulgar; some times she said "I seen" and "If I had've known." But what would grammar matter if he really loved her? He could not make up his mind whether to like her or despise her for what she had done. Of course he had done it too. His instinct urged him to remain free, not to marry. Once you are married you are done for, it said.

While he was sitting helplessly on the side of the bed in shirt and trousers she tapped lightly at his door and entered. She told him all, that she had made a clean breast of it to her mother and that her mother would speak with him that morning. She cried and threw her arms round his neck, saying:

"O Bob! Bob! What am I to do? What am I to do at all?"

She would put an end to herself, she said.

He comforted her feebly, telling her not to cry, that it would be all right, never fear. He felt against his shirt the agitation of her bosom.

It was not altogether his fault that it had happened. He remembered well, with the curious patient memory of the celibate, the first casual caresses her dress, her breath, her fingers had given him. Then late one night as he was undressing for she had tapped at his door, timidly. She wanted to relight her candle at his for hers had been blown out by a gust. It was her bath night. She wore a loose open combing-jacket of printed flannel. Her white instep shone in the opening of her furry slippers and the blood glowed warmly behind her perfumed skin. From her hands and wrists too as she lit and steadied her candle a faint perfume arose.

On nights when he came in very late it was she who warmed up his dinner. He scarcely knew what he was eating feeling her beside him alone, at night, in the sleeping house. And her thoughtfulness! If the night was anyway cold or wet or windy there was sure to be a little tumbler of punch ready for him. Perhaps they could be happy together....

They used to go upstairs together on tiptoe, each with a candle, and on the third landing exchange reluctant goodnights. They used to kiss. He remembered well her eyes, the touch of her hand and his delirium....

But delirium passes. He echoed her phrase, applying it to himself: "What am I to do?" The instinct of the celibate warned him to hold back. But the sin was there; even his sense of honour told him that reparation must be made for such a sin.

While he was sitting with her on the side of the bed Mary came to the door and said that the missus wanted to see him in the parlour. He stood up to put on his coat and waistcoat, more helpless than ever. When he was dressed he went over to her to comfort her. It would be all right, never fear. He left her crying on the bed and moaning softly: "O my God!"

Going down the stairs his glasses became so dimmed with moisture that he had to take them off and polish them. He longed to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country where he would never hear again of his trouble, and yet a force pushed him downstairs step by step. The implacable faces of his employer and of the Madam stared upon his discomfiture. On the last flight of stairs he passed Jack Mooney who was coming up from the pantry nursing two bottles of Bass. They saluted coldly; and the lover's eyes rested for a second or two on a thick bulldog face and

a pair of thick short arms. When he reached the foot of the staircase he glanced up and saw Jack regarding him from the door of the return-room.

Suddenly he remembered the night when one of the musichall artistes, a little blond Londoner, had made a rather free allusion to Polly. The reunion had been almost broken up on account of Jack's violence. Everyone tried to quiet him. The music-hall artiste, a little paler than usual, kept smiling and saying that there was no harm meant: but Jack kept shouting at him that if any fellow tried that sort of a game on with his sister he'd bloody well put his teeth down his throat, so he would.

Polly sat for a little time on the side of the bed, crying. Then she dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear. Then she went back to the bed again and sat at the foot. She regarded the pillows for a long time and the sight of them awakened in her mind secret, amiable memories. She rested the nape of her neck against the cool iron bed-rail and fell into a reverie. There was no longer any perturbation visible on her face.

She waited on patiently, almost cheerfully, without alarm. her memories gradually giving place to hopes and visions of the future. Her hopes and visions were so intricate that she no longer saw the white pillows on which her gaze was fixed or remembered that she was waiting for anything.

At last she heard her mother calling. She started to her feet and ran to the banisters.

"Polly! Polly!"

"Yes, mamma?"

"Come down, dear. Mr. Doran wants to speak to you."

Then she remembered what she had been waiting for.

THE HOME OF WOODRUFFE THE GARDENER

from *Choice Stories from Household Words; Second Series*, by Charles Dickens

I.

“How pleased the boy looks, to be sure!” observed Woodruffe to his wife, as his son Allan caught up little Moss (as Maurice had chosen to call himself before he could speak plain) and made him jump from the top of the drawers upon the chair, and then from the chair to the ground. “He is making all that racket just because he is so pleased he does not know what to do with himself.”

“I suppose he will forgive Fleming now for carrying off Abby,” said the mother. “I say, Allan, what do you think now of Abby marrying away from us?”

“Why, I think it’s a very good thing. You know she never told me that we should go and live where she lived, and in such a pretty place, too, where I may have a garden of my own, and see what I can make of it--all fresh from the beginning, as father says.”

“You are to try your hand at the business, I know,” replied the mother, “but I never heard your father, nor any one else, say that the place was a pretty one. I did not think new railway stations had been pretty places at all.”

“It sounds so to him, naturally,” interposed Woodruffe. “He hears of a south aspect, and a slope to the north for shelter, and the town seen far off; and that sounds all very pleasant. And then, there is the thought of the journey, and the change, and the fun of getting the ground all into nice order, and, best of all, the seeing his sister so soon again. Youth is the time for hope and joy, you know, love.”

And Woodruffe began to whistle, and stepped forward to take his turn at jumping Moss, whom he carried in one flight from the top of the drawers to the floor. Mrs. Woodruffe smiled, as she thought that youth was not the only season, with some people, for hope and joy.

Her husband, always disposed to look on the bright side, was particularly happy this evening. The lease of his market-garden ground was just expiring. He had prospered on it; and would have desired nothing better than to live by it as long as he lived at all. He desired this so much that he would not believe a word of what people had been saying for two years past, that his ground would be wanted by his landlord on the expiration of the lease, and that it would not be let again. His wife had long foreseen this; but not till the last moment would he do what she thought should have been done long before--offer to

buy the ground. At the ordinary price of land, he could accomplish the purchase of it; but when he found his landlord unwilling to sell, he bid higher and higher, till his wife was so alarmed at the rashness, that she was glad when a prospect of entire removal opened. Woodruffe was sure that he could have paid off all he offered at the end of a few years; but his partner thought it would have been a heavy burden on their minds, and a sad waste of money; and she was therefore, in her heart, obliged to the landlord for persisting in his refusal to sell.

When that was settled, Woodruffe became suddenly sure that he could pick up an acre or two of land somewhere not far off. But he was mistaken; and, if he had not been mistaken, market-gardening was no longer the profitable business it had been, when it enabled him to lay by something every year. By the opening of a railway, the townspeople, a few miles off, got themselves better supplied with vegetables from another quarter. It was this which put it into the son-in-law's head to propose the removal of the family into Staffordshire, where he held a small appointment on a railway. Land might be had at a low rent near the little country station where his business lay; and the railway brought within twenty minutes' distance a town where there must be a considerable demand for garden produce. The place was in a raw state at present; and there were so few houses, that, if there had been a choice of time, the Flemings would rather have put off the coming of the family till some of the cottages already planned had been built; but the Woodruffes must remove in September, and all parties agreed that they should not mind a little crowding for a few months. Fleming's cottage was to hold them all till some chance of more accommodation should offer.

"I'll tell you what," said Woodruffe, after standing for some time, half whistling and thinking, with that expression on his face which his wife had long learned to be afraid of, "I'll write to-morrow--let's see--I may as well do it to-night;" and he looked round for paper and ink. "I'll write to Fleming, and get him to buy the land for me at once."

"Before you see it?" said his wife, looking up from her stocking mending.

"Yes. I know all about it, as much as if I were standing on it this moment; and I am sick of this work--of being turned out just when I had made the most of a place, and got attached to it. I'll make a sure thing of it this time, and not have such a pull at my heart-strings again. And the land will be cheaper now than later; and we shall go to work upon it with such heart, if it is our own! Eh?"

"Certainly, if we find, after seeing it, that we like it as well as we expect. I would just wait till then."

"As well as we expect! Why, bless my soul! don't we know all about it?"

It is not any land-agent or interested person, that has described it to us; but our own daughter and her husband; and do not they know what we want? The quantity at my own choice; the aspect capital; plenty of water (only too much, indeed); the soil anything but poor, and sand and marl within reach to reduce the stiffness; and manure at command, all along the railway, from half-a-dozen towns; and osier-beds at hand (within my own bounds if I like) giving all manner of convenience for fencing, and binding, and covering! Why, what would you have?"

"It sounds very pleasant, certainly."

"Then, how can you make objections? I can't think where you look, to find any objections?"

"I see none now, and I only want to be sure that we shall find none when we arrive."

"Well! I do call that unreasonable! To expect to find any place on earth altogether unobjectionable! I wonder what objection could be so great as being turned out of one after another, just as we have got them into order. Here comes our girl. Well, Becky, I see how you like the news! Now, would not you like it better still if we were going to a place of our own, where we should not be under any landlord's whims? We should have to work, you know, one and all. But we would get the land properly manured, and have a cottage of our own in time; would not we? Will you undertake the pigs, Becky?"

"Yes, father; and there are many things I can do in the garden too. I am old and strong, now; and I can do much more than I have ever done here."

"Aye; if the land was our own," said Woodruffe, with a glance at his wife. She said no more, but was presently up stairs putting Moss to bed. She knew, from long experience, how matters would go. After a restless night, Woodruffe spoke no more of buying the land without seeing it; and he twice said, in a meditative, rather than a communicative way, that he believed it would take as much capital as he had to remove his family, and get his new land into fit condition for spring crops.

II.

"You may look out now for the place. Look out for our new garden. We are just there now," said Woodruffe to the children as the whistle sounded, and the train was approaching the station. It had been a glorious autumn day from the beginning; and for the last hour, while the beauty of the light on fields and trees and water had been growing more striking, the children, tired with the novelty of all that they had seen since morning, had been dropping asleep. They roused up suddenly enough at the news that they were reaching their new home; and thrust their heads to

the windows, eagerly asking on which side they were to look for their garden. It was on the south, the left-hand side; but it might have been anywhere, for what they could see of it. Below the embankment was something like a sheet of gray water, spreading far away.

“It is going to be a foggy night,” observed Woodruffe. The children looked into the air for the fog, which had always, in their experience, arrived by that way from the sea. The sky was all a clear blue, except where a pale green and a faint blush of pink streaked the west. A large planet beamed clear and bright; and the air was so transparent that the very leaves on the trees might almost be counted. Yet could nothing be seen below for the gray mist which was rising, from moment to moment.

Fleming met them as they alighted; but he could not stay till he had seen to the other passengers. His wife was there. She had been a merry-hearted girl; and now, still so young, as to look as girlish as ever, she seemed even merrier than ever. She did not look strong, but she had hardly thrown off what she called “a little touch of the ague;” and she declared herself perfectly well when the wind was anywhere but in the wrong quarter. Allan wondered how the wind could go wrong. He had never heard of such a thing before. He had known the wind too high, when it did mischief among his father’s fruit trees; but it had never occurred to him that it was not free to come and go whence and whither it would, without blame or objection.

“Come--come home,” exclaimed Mrs. Fleming, “Never mind about your bags and boxes! My husband will take care of them. Let me show you the way home.”

She let go the hands of the young brothers, and loaded them, and then herself, with parcels, that they might not think they were going to lose everything, as she said; and then tripped on before to show the way. The way was down steps, from the highest of which two or three chimney-tops might be seen piercing the mist which hid everything else. Down, down, down went the party, by so many steps that little Moss began to totter under his bundle.

“How low this place lies!” observed the mother.

“Why, yes;” replied Mrs. Fleming. “And yet I don’t know. I believe it is rather that the railway runs high.”

“Yes, yes; that is it,” said Woodruffe. “What an embankment this is! If this is to shelter my garden to the north--”

“Yes, yes, it is. I knew you would like it,” exclaimed Mrs. Fleming. “I said you would be delighted. I only wish you could see your ground at once; but it seems rather foggy, and I suppose we must wait till the morning. Here we are at home.”

The travellers were rather surprised to see how very small a house this "home" was. Though called a cottage, it had not the look of one. It was of a red brick, dingy, though evidently new; and, to all appearance, it consisted of merely a room below, and one above. On walking round it, however, a sloping roof in two directions gave a hint of further accommodation.

When the whole party had entered, and Mrs. Fleming had kissed them all round, her glance at her mother asked, as plainly as any words, "Is not this a pleasant room?"

"A pretty room, indeed, my dear," was the mother's reply, "and as nicely furnished as one could wish."

She did not say anything of the rust which her quick eye perceived on the fire-irons and the door-key, or of the damp which stained the walls just above the skirting-board. There was nothing amiss with the ceiling, or the higher parts of the wall,--so it might be an accident.

"But, my dear," asked the mother, seeing how sleepy Moss looked, "Where are you going to put us all? If we crowd you out of all comfort, I shall be sorry we came so soon."

As Mrs. Fleming led the way upstairs, she reminded her family of their agreement not to mind a little crowding for a time. If her mother thought there was not room for all the newly arrived in this chamber, they could fit out a corner for Allan in the place where she and her husband were to sleep.

"All of us in this room?" exclaimed Becky.

"Yes, Becky; why not? Here, you see, is a curtain between your bed and the large one; and your bed is large enough to let little Moss sleep with you. And here is a morsel of a bed for Allan in the other corner; and I have another curtain ready to shut it in."

"But," said Becky, who was going on to object. Her mother stopped her by a sign.

"Or," continued Mrs. Fleming, "if you like to let Allan and his bed and curtain come down to our place, you will have plenty of room here; much more than my neighbors have, for the most part. How it will be when the new cottages are built, I don't know. We think them too small for new houses; but, meantime, there are the Brookes sleeping seven in a room no bigger than this, and the Vines six in one much smaller."

"How do they manage, now?" asked the mother. "In case of illness, say; and how do they wash and dress?"

“Ah! that is the worst part of it. I don’t think the boys wash themselves--what we should call washing--for weeks together; or at least only on Saturday nights. So they slip their clothes on in two minutes; and then their mother and sisters can get up. But there is the pump below for Allan, and he can wash as much as he pleases.”

It was not till the next day that Mrs. Woodruffe knew--and then it was Allan who told her--that the pump was actually in the very place where the Flemings slept,--close by their bed. The Flemings were, in truth, sleeping in an outhouse, where the floor was of brick, the swill-tub stood in one corner, the coals were heaped in another, and the light came in from a square hole high up, which had never till now been glazed. Plenty of air rushed in under the door, and yet some more between the tiles,--there being no plaster beneath them. As soon as Mrs. Woodruffe had been informed of this, and had stepped in, while her daughter’s back was turned, to make her own observations, she went out by herself for a walk,--so long a walk, that it was several hours before she reappeared, heated and somewhat depressed. She had roamed the country round, in search of lodgings; and finding none,--finding no occupier who really could possibly spare a room on any terms,--she had returned convinced that, serious as the expense would be, she and her family ought to settle themselves in the nearest town,--her husband going to his business daily by the third-class train, till a dwelling could be provided for them on the spot.

When she returned, the children were on the watch for her; and little Moss had strong hopes that she would not know him. He had a great cap of rushes on his head, with a heavy bulrush for a feather; he was stuck all over with water-flags and bulrushes, and carried a long osier wand, wherewith to flog all those who did not admire him enough in his new style of dress. The children were clamorous for their mother to come down, and see the nice places where they got these new playthings; and she would have gone, but that their father came up, and decreed it otherwise. She was heated and tired, he said; and he would not have her go till she was easy and comfortable enough to see things in the best light.

Her impression was that her husband was, more or less (and she did not know why), disappointed; but he did not say so. He would not hear of going off to the town, being sure that some place would turn up soon,--some place where they might put their heads at night; and the Flemings should be no losers by having their company by day. Their boarding all together, if the sleeping could but be managed, would be a help to the young people,--a help which it was pleasant to him, as a father, to be able to give them. He said nothing about the land that was not in praise of it. Its quality was excellent; or would be when it had good treatment. It would take some time and trouble to get it in order,--so much that it would never do to live at a distance from it.

Besides, no trains that would suit him ran at the proper hours; so there was an end of it. They must all rough it a little for a time, and expect their reward afterwards.

There was nothing that Woodruffe was so hard to please in as the time when he should take his wife to see the ground. It was close at hand; yet he hindered her going in the morning, and again after their early dinner. He was anxious that she should not be prejudiced, or take a dislike at first; and in the morning, the fog was so thick that everything looked dank and dreary; and in the middle of the day, when a warm autumn sun had dissolved the mists, there certainly was a most disagreeable smell hanging about. It was not gone at sunset; but by that time Mrs. Woodruffe was impatient, and she appeared--Allan showing her the way--just when her husband was scraping his feet upon his spade, after a hard day of digging.

"There, now!" said he, good-humoredly, striking his spade into the ground, "Fleming said you would be down before we were ready for you; and here you are!--Yes, ready for you. There are some planks coming, to keep your feet out of the wet among all this clay."

"And yours, too, I hope," said the wife. "I don't mind such wet, after rain, as you have been accustomed to; but to stand in a puddle like this is a very different thing."

"Yes--so 'tis. But we'll have the planks; and they will serve for running the wheelbarrow, too. It is too much for Allan, or any boy, to run the barrow in such a soil as this. We'll have the planks first; and then we'll drain, and drain, and get rare spring crops."

"What have they given you this artificial pond for," asked the wife, "if you must drain so much?"

"That is no pond. All the way along here, on both sides the railway, there is the mischief of these pits. They dig out the clay for bricks, and then leave the places--pits like this, some of them six feet deep. The railways have done a deal of good for the poor man, and will do a great deal more yet; but, at present, this one has left those pits."

"I hope Moss will not fall into one. They are very dangerous," declared the mother, looking about for the child.

"He is safe enough there, among the osiers," said the father. "He has lost his heart outright to the osiers. However, I mean to drain and fill up this pit, when I find a good out-fall; and then we will have all high and dry, and safe for the children. I don't care so much for the pit as for the ditches there. Don't you notice the bad smell?"

"Yes, indeed, that struck me the first night."

"I have been inquiring to-day, and I find there is one acre in twenty hereabouts occupied with foul ditches like that. And then the overflow from them and the pits, spoils many an acre more. There is a stretch of water-flags and bulrushes, and nasty coarse grass and rushes, nothing but a swamp, where the ground is naturally as good as this; and, look here! Fleming was rather out, I tell him, when he wrote that I might graze a pony on the pasture below, whenever I have a market-cart. I ask him if he expects me to water it here."

So saying, Woodruffe led the way to one of the ditches which, instead of fences, bounded his land; and, moving the mass of weed with a stick, showed the water beneath, covered with a whitish bubbling scum, the smell of which was insufferable.

"There is plenty of manure there," said Woodruffe; "that is the only thing that can be said for it. We'll make manure of it, and sweep out the ditch, and deepen it, and narrow it, and not use up so many feet of good ground for a ditch that does nothing but poison us. A fence is better than a ditch any day. I'll have a fence, and still save ten feet of ground, the whole way down."

"There is a great deal to do here," observed the wife.

"And good reward when it is done," Woodruffe replied. "If I can fall in with a stout laborer, he and Allan and I can get our spring crops prepared for; and I expect they will prove the goodness of the soil. There is Fleming. Supper is ready, I suppose."

The children were called, but both were so wet and dirty that it took twice as long as usual to make them fit to sit at table; and apologies were made for keeping supper waiting. The grave half-hour before Moss's bed-time was occupied with the most solemn piece of instruction he had ever had in his life. His father carried him up to the railway, and made him understand the danger of playing there. He was never to play there. His father would go up with him once a day, and let him see a train pass; and this was the only time he was ever to mount the steps, except by express leave. Moss was put to bed in silence, with his father's deep, grave voice, sounding in his ears.

"He will not forget it," declared his father. "He will give us no trouble about the railway. The next thing is the pit. Allan, I expect you to see that he does not fall into the pit. In time, we shall teach him to take care of himself; but you must remember, meanwhile, that the pit is six feet deep--deeper than I am high; and that the edge is the same clay that you slipped on so often this morning."

"Yes, father," said Allan, looking as grave as if power of life and death were in his hands.

III.

One fine morning in the next spring, there was more stir and cheerfulness about the Woodruffes' dwelling than there had been of late. The winter had been somewhat dreary; and now the spring was anxious; for Woodruffe's business was not, as yet, doing very well. His hope, when he bought his pony and cart, was to dispatch by railway to the town the best of his produce, and sell the commoner part in the country neighborhood, sending his cart round within the reach of a few miles. As it turned out, he had nothing yet to send to the town, and his agent there was vexed and displeased. No radishes, onions, early salads, or rhubarb were ready, and it would be some time yet before they were.

"I am sure I have done everything I could," said Woodruffe to Fleming, as they both lent a hand to put the pony into the cart. "Nobody can say that I have not made drains enough, or that they are not deep enough; yet the frost has taken such a hold that one would think we were living in the north of Scotland, instead of in Staffordshire."

"It has not been a severe season either," observed Fleming.

"There's the vexation," replied Woodruffe. "If it had been a season which set us at defiance, and made all sufferers alike, one must just submit to a loss, and go on again, like one's neighbors. But, you see, I am cut out, as my agent says, from the market. Everybody else has spring vegetables there, as usual. It is no use telling him that I never failed before. But I know what it is. It is yonder great ditch that does the mischief."

"Why, we have nothing to do with that."

"That is the very reason. If it was mine or yours, do you think I should not have taken it in hand long ago? All my draining goes for little while that shallow ditch keeps my ground a continual sop. It is all uneven along the bottom;--not the same depth for three feet together anywhere, and not deep enough by two feet in any part. So there it is, choked up and putrid; and, after an hour or two of rain, my garden gets such a soaking that the next frost is destruction."

"I will speak about it again," said Fleming. "We must have it set right before next winter."

"I think we have seen enough of the uselessness of speaking," replied Woodruffe, gloomily. "If we tease the gentry any more, they may punish you for it. I would show them my mind by being off,--throwing up my bargain at all costs, if I had not put so much into the ground that I have nothing left to move away with."

“Don’t be afraid for me,” said Fleming, cheerfully. “It was chiefly my doing that you came here, and I must try my utmost to obtain fair conditions for you. We must remember that the benefit of your outlay has all to come.”

“Yes; I can’t say we have got much of it yet.”

“By next winter,” continued Fleming, “your privet hedges and screens will have grown up into some use against the frost; and your own drainage----. Come, come, Allan, my boy! be off! It is getting late.”

Allan seemed to be idling, re-arranging his bunches of small radishes, and little bundles of rhubarb, in their clean baskets, and improving the stick with which he was to drive; but he pleaded that he was waiting for Moss, and for the parcel which his mother was getting ready for Becky.

“Ah I my poor little girl!” said Woodruffe. “Give my love to her, and tell her it will be a happy day when we can send for her to come home again. Be sure you observe particularly, to tell us how she looks; and, mind, if she fancies anything in the cart,--any radishes, or whatever else, because it comes out of our garden, be sure you give it her. I wish I was going myself with the cart, for the sake of seeing Becky; but I must go to work. Here have I been all the while, waiting to see you off. Ah! here they come! you may always have notice now of who is coming by that child’s crying.”

“O, father! not always!” exclaimed Allan.

“Far too often, I’m sure. I never knew a child grow so fractious. I am saying, my dear,” to his wife, who now appeared with her parcel, and Moss in his best hat, “that boy is the most fractious child we ever had; and he is getting too old for that to begin now. How can you spoil him so?”

“I am not aware,” said Mrs. Woodruffe, her eyes filling with tears, “that I treat him differently from the rest; but the child is not well. His chilblains tease him terribly, and I wish there may be nothing worse.”

“Warm weather will soon cure the chilblains, and then I hope we shall see an end of the fretting.--Now, leave off crying this minute, Moss, or you don’t go. You don’t see me cry with my rheumatism, and that is worse than chilblains, I can tell you.”

Moss tried to stifle his sobs, while his mother put more straw into the cart for him, and cautioned Allan to be careful of him, for it really seemed as if the child was tender all over. Allan seemed to succeed best as comforter. He gave Moss the stick to wield, and showed him how to

make believe to whip the pony, so that before they turned the corner, Moss was wholly engrossed with what he called driving.

“Yes, yes,” said Woodruffe, as he turned away to go to the garden, “Allan is the one to manage, him. He can take as good care of him as any woman without spoiling him!”

Mrs. Woodruffe submitted to this in silence; but with the feeling that she did not deserve it.

Becky had had no notice of this visit from her brothers; but no such visit could take her by surprise; for she was thinking of her family all day long, every day, and fancying she should see them whichever way she turned. It was not her natural destination to be a servant in a farm-house; she had never expected it,--never been prepared for it. She was as willing to work as any girl could be; and her help in the gardening was beyond what most women are capable of; but it was a bitter thing to her to go among strangers, and toil for them, when she knew that she was wanted at home by father and mother, and brothers, and just at present by her sister too; for Mrs. Fleming’s confinement was to happen this spring. The reason why Becky was not at home while so much wanted there was, that there really was no accommodation for her. The plan of sleeping all huddled together as they were at first would not do. The girl herself could not endure it; and her parents felt that she must be got out at any sacrifice. They had inquired diligently till they found a place for her in a farm-house, where the good wife promised protection, and care, and kindness; and fulfilled her promise to the best of her power.

“I hope they do well by you here, Becky,” asked Allan, when the surprise caused by his driving up with a dash had subsided, and everybody had retired, to leave Becky with her brothers for the few minutes they could stay. “I hope they are kind to you here.”

“O, yes,--very kind. And I am sure you ought to say so to father and mother.”

Becky had jumped into the cart, and had her arms round Moss, and her head on his shoulder. Raising her head, and with her eyes filling as she spoke, she inquired anxiously how the new cottages went on, and when father and mother were to have a home of their own again. She owned, but did not wish her father and mother to hear of it, that she did not like being among such rough people as the farm servants. She did not like some of the behavior that she saw; and, still less, such talk as she was obliged to overhear. When _would_ a cottage be ready for them?

“Why, the new cottages would soon be getting on now,” Allan said; but he didn’t know, nobody fancied the look of them. He saw them just after the foundations were laid; and the enclosed parts were like a clay-puddle.

He did not see how they were ever to be improved; for the curse of wet seemed to be on them, as upon everything about the Station. Fleming's cottage was the best he had seen, after all, if only it was twice as large. If anything could be done to make the new cottages what cottages should be, it would be done: for everybody agreed that the railway gentlemen desired to do the best for their people, and to set an example in that respect; but it was beyond anybody's power to make wet clay as healthy as warm gravel. Unless they could go to work first to dry the soil, it seemed a hopeless sort of affair.

"But, I say, Becky," pursued Allan, "you know about my garden--that father gave me a garden of my own."

Becky's head was turned quite away; and she did not look round, when she replied,

"Yes; I remember. How does your garden get on?"

There was something in her voice which made her brother lean over and look into her face; and, as he expected, tears were running down her cheeks.

"There now!" said he, whipping the back of the cart with his stick; "something must be done, if you can't get on here."

"O! I can get on. Be sure you don't tell mother that I can't get on, or anything about it."

"You look healthy, to be sure."

"To be sure I am. Don't say any more about it. Tell me about your garden."

"Well: I am trying what I can make of it, after I have done working with father. But it takes a long time to bring it round."

"What! is the wet there, too?"

"Lord, yes! The wet was beyond everything at first. I could not leave the spade in the ground ten minutes, if father called me, but the water was standing in the hole when I went back again. It is not so bad now, since I made a drain to join upon father's principal one; and father gave me some sand, and plenty of manure; but it seems to us that manure does little good. It won't sink in when the ground is so wet."

"Well, there will be the summer next, and that will dry up your garden."

"Yes. People say the smells are dreadful in hot weather, though. But we seem to get used to that. I thought it sickly work, just after we came,

going down to get osiers, and digging near the big ditch that is our plague now: but somehow, it does not strike me now as it did then, though Fleming says it is getting worse every warm day. But come--I must be off. What will you help yourself to? And don't forget your parcel."

Becky's great anxiety was to know when her brothers would come again. O! very often, she was assured--oftener and oftener as the vegetables came forward; whenever there were either too many or too few to send to the town by rail.

After Becky had jumped down, the farmer and one of the men were seen to be contemplating the pony.

"What have you been giving your pony lately?" asked the farmer of Allan. "I ask as a friend, having some experience of this part of the country. Have you been letting him graze?"

"Yes, in the bit of meadow that we have leave for. There is a good deal of grass there, now. He has been grazing there these three weeks."

"On the meadow where the osier beds are? Ay! I knew it by the look of him. Tell your father that if he does not take care, his pony will have the staggers in no time. An acquaintance of mine grazed some cattle there once; and in a week or two, they were all feverish, so that the butcher refused them on any terms; and I have seen more than one horse in the staggers, after grazing in marshes of that sort."

"There is fine thick grass there, and plenty of it," said Allan, who did not like that anybody but themselves should criticise their new place and plans.

"Ay, ay; I know," replied the farmer. "But if you try to make hay of that grass, you'll be surprised to find how long it takes to make, and how like wool it comes out at last. It is a coarse grass, with no strength in it; and it must be a stronger beast than this that will bear feeding on it. Just do you tell your father what I say, that's all; and then he can do as he pleases; but I would take a different way with that pony, without loss of time, if it was mine."

Allan did not much like taking this sort of message to his father, who was not altogether so easy to please as he used to be. If anything vexed him ever so little, he always began to complain of his rheumatism--and he now complained of his rheumatism many times in a day. It was managed, however, by tacking a little piece of amusement and pride upon it. Moss was taught, all the way as they went home, after selling their vegetables, how much everything sold for; and he was to deliver the money to his father, and go through his lesson as gravely as any big man. It succeeded very well. Everybody laughed. Woodruffe called the child his little man-of-business; gave him a penny out of the money he

brought; and when he found that the child did not like jumping as he used to do, carried him up to the railway to listen for the whistle, and see the afternoon train come up, and stop a minute, and go on again.

IV.

Fleming did what he could to find fair play for his father-in-law. He spoke to one and another--to the officers of the railway, and to the owners of neighboring plots of ground, about the bad drainage, which was injuring everybody; but he could not learn that anything was likely to be done. The ditch--the great evil of all--had always been there, he was told, and people never used to complain of it. When Fleming pointed out that it was at first a comparatively deep ditch, and that it grew shallower every year from the accumulations formed by its uneven bottom, there were some who admitted that it might be as well to clean it out; yet nobody set about it. And it was truly a more difficult affair now than it would have been at an earlier time. If the ditch was shallower, it was much wider. It had once been twelve feet wide, and it was now eighteen. When any drain had been flowing into it, or after a rainy day, the contents spread through and over the soil on each side, and softened it, and then the next time any horse or cow came to drink, the whole bank was made a perfect bog; for the poor animals, however thirsty, tried twenty places to find water that they could drink before going away in despair. Such was the bar in the way of poor Woodruffe's success with his ground. Before the end of summer his patience was nearly worn out. During a showery and gleamy May and a pleasant June, he had gone on as prosperously as he could expect under the circumstances; and he confidently anticipated that a seasonable July and August would set him up. But he had had no previous experience of the peculiarities of ill-drained land; and the hot July and August, from which he hoped so much, did him terrible mischief. The drought which would have merely dried and pulverized a well-drained soil, leaving it free to profit much by small waterings, baked the overcharged soil of Woodruffe's garden into hard hot masses of clay, amidst which his produce died off faster and faster every day, even though he and all his family wore out their strength with constant watering. He did hope, he said, that he should have been spared drought at least; but it seemed as if he was to have every plague in turn; and the drought seemed, at the time, to be the worst of all.

One day Fleming saw a welcome face in one of the carriages; Mr. Nelson, a director of the railway, who was looking along the line to see how matters went. Though Mr. Nelson was not exactly the one, of all the directors, whom Fleming would have chosen to appeal to, he saw that the opportunity must not be lost; and he entreated him to alight, and stay for the next train.

"Eh! what!" said Mr. Nelson; "what can you want with us here? A station

like this! Why, one has to put on spectacles to see it!”

“If you would come down, sir, I should be glad to show you....”

“Well; I suppose I must.”

As they were standing on the little platform, and the train was growing smaller in the distance, Fleming proceeded to business. He told of the serious complaints that were made for a distance of a few miles on either hand, of the clay pits left by the railway brickmakers, to fill with stagnant waters.

“Pho! pho! Is that what you want to say?” replied Mr. Nelson. “You need not have stopped me just to tell me that. We hear of those pits all along the line. We are sick of hearing of them.”

“That does not mend the matter in this place,” observed Fleming. “I speak freely, sir, but I think it my duty to say that something must be done. I heard a few days ago, more than the people hereabouts know,--much more than I shall tell them--of the fever that has settled on particular points of our line; and I now assure you, sir, that if the fever once gets a hold in this place, I believe it may carry us all off before anything can be done. Sir, there is not one of us within half a mile of the station that has a wholesome dwelling.”

“Pho! pho! you are a croaker,” declared Mr. Nelson. “Never saw such a dismal fellow! Why, you will die of fright, if ever you die of anything.”

“Then, sir, will you have the goodness to walk round with me, and see for yourself what you think of things. It is not only for myself and my family that I speak. In an evil day I induced my wife’s family to settle here, and....”

“Ay! that is a nice garden,” observed Mr. Nelson, as Fleming pointed to Woodruffe’s land. “You are a croaker, Fleming. I declare I think the place is much improved since I saw it last. People would not come and settle here if the place was like what you say.”

Instead of arguing the matter, Fleming led the way down the long flight of steps. He was aware that leading the gentleman among bad smells and over shoes in a foul bog would have more effect than any argument was ever known to have on his contradictory spirit.

“You should have seen worse things than these, and then you would not be so discontented,” observed Mr. Nelson, striking his stick upon the hard-baked soil, all intersected with cracks. “I have seen such a soil as this in Spain, some days after a battle, when there were scores of fingers and toes sticking up out of the cracks. What would you say to

that?--eh?"

"We may have a chance of seeing that here," replied Fleming; "if the plague comes, and comes too fast for the coffin-makers,--a thing which has happened more than once in England, I believe."

Mr. Nelson stopped to laugh; but he certainly attended more to business as he went on; and Fleming, who knew something of his ways, had hopes that if he could only keep his own temper, this visit of the director might not be without good results.

In passing through Woodruffe's garden, very nice management was necessary. Woodruffe was at work there, charged with ire against railway directors and landed proprietors, whom, amidst the pangs of his rheumatism, he regarded as the poisoners of his land and the bane of his fortunes; while, on the other hand, Mr. Nelson, who had certainly never been a market gardener, criticized and ridiculed everything that met his eye. What was the use of such a tool-house as that?--big enough for a house for them all. What was the use of such low fences?--of such high screens?--of making the walks so wide?--sheer waste?--of making the beds so long one way, and so narrow another?--of planting or sowing this and that?--things that nobody wanted. Woodruffe had pushed back his hat in preparation for a defiant reply, when Fleming caught his eye, and, by a good-tempered smile, conveyed to him that they had an oddity to deal with. Allan, who had begun by listening reverently, was now looking from one to another in great perplexity.

"What is that boy here for, staring like a dunce? Why don't you send him to school? You neglect a parent's duty if you don't send him to school."

Woodruffe answered by a smile of contempt, walked away, and went to work at a distance.

"That boy is very well taught," Fleming said, quietly. "He is a great reader, and will soon be fit to keep his father's accounts."

"What does he stare in that manner for, then? I took him for a dunce."

"He is not accustomed to hear his father called in question, either as a gardener or a parent."

"Pho! pho! I might as well have waited, though, till he was out of hearing. Well, is this all you have to show me? I think you make a great fuss about nothing."

"Will you walk this way?" said Fleming, turning down towards the osier beds, without any compassion for the gentleman's boots or olfactory nerves. For a long while Mr. Nelson affected to admire the reed, and water-flags, and marsh-blossoms, declared the decayed vegetation to be

peat soil, very fine peat, which the ladies would be glad of for their heaths in the flower-garden,--and thought there must be good fowling here in winter. Fleming quietly turned over the so-called peat with a stick, letting it be seen that it was a mere dung-heap of decayed rushes, and wished Mr. Nelson would come in the fowling season, and see what the place was like.

“The children are merry enough, however,” observed the gentleman. “They can laugh here, much as in other places. I advise you to take a lesson from them, Fleming. Now, don’t you teach them to croak.”

The laughter sounded from the direction of the old brick-ground; and thither they now turned. Two little boys were on the brink of a pit, so intent on watching a rat in the water and on pelting it with stones, that they did not see that anybody was coming to disturb them. In answer to Mr. Nelson’s question, whether they were vagrants, and why vagrants were permitted there, Fleming answered that the younger one--the pale-faced one--was his little brother-in-law; the other--

“Ay, now, you will be telling me next that the pale face is the fault of this place.”

“It certainly is,” said Fleming. “That child was chubby enough when he came.”

“Pho, pho! a puny little wretch as ever I saw--puny from its birth, I have no doubt of it. And who is the other--a gypsy?”

“He looks like it,” replied Fleming. On being questioned, Moss told that the boy lived near, and he had often played with him lately. Yes, he lived near, just beyond those trees; not in a house, only a sort of house the people had made for themselves. Mr. Nelson liked to lecture vagrants, even more than other people; so Moss was required to show the way, and his dark-skinned playfellow was not allowed to skulk behind.

Moss led his party on, over the tufty hay-colored grass, skipping from bunch to bunch of rushes, round the osier-beds, and at last straight through a clump of elders, behind whose screen now appeared the house, as Moss had called it, which the gypsies had made for themselves. It was the tilt of a wagon, serving as a tent. Nobody was visible but a woman, crouching under the shadow of the tent, to screen from the sun that which was lying across her lap.

“What is that that she’s nursing? Lord bless me! Can that be a child?” exclaimed Mr. Nelson.

“A child in the fever,” replied Fleming.

“Lord bless me!--to see legs and arms hang down like that!” exclaimed

the gentleman; and he forthwith gave the woman a lecture on her method of nursing--scolded her for letting the child get a fever--for not putting it to bed--for not getting a doctor to it--for being a gypsy, and living under an alder clump. He then proceeded to inquire whether she had anybody else in the tent, where her husband was, whether he lived by thieving, how they would all like being transported, whether she did not think her children would all be hanged, and so on. At first, the woman tried a facetious and wheedling tone, then a whimpering one, and, finally, a scolding one. The last answered well. Mr. Nelson found that a man, to say nothing of a gentleman, has no chance with a woman with a sore heart in her breast, and a sick child in her lap, when once he has driven her to her weapon of the tongue. He said afterwards, that he had once gone to Billingsgate, on purpose to set two fisherwomen quarrelling, that he might see what it was like. The scene had fulfilled all his expectations; but he now declared that it could not compare with this exhibition behind the alders. He stood a long while, first trying to overpower the woman's voice; and, when that seemed hopeless, poking about among the rushes with his stick, and finally, staring in the woman's face, in a mood between consternation and amusement;--thus he stood, waiting till the torrent should intermit; but there was no sign of intermission; and when the sick child began to move and rouse itself, and look at the strangers, as if braced by the vigor of its mother's tongue, the prospect of an end seemed farther off than ever. Mr. Nelson shrugged his shoulders, signed to his companions, and walked away through the alders. The woman was not silent because they were out of sight. Her voice waxed shriller as it followed them, and died away only in the distance. Moss was grasping Fleming's hand with all his might when Mr. Nelson spoke to him, and shook his stick at him, asking him how he came to play with such people, and saying that if ever he heard him learning to scold like that woman, he would beat him with that stick; so Moss vowed he never would.

When the train was in sight by which Mr. Nelson was to depart, he turned to Fleming, with the most careless air imaginable, saying, "Have you any medicine in your house?--any bark?"

"Not any. But I will send for some."

"Ay, do. Or,--no--I will send you some. See if you can't get these people housed somewhere, so that they may not sleep in the swamp. I don't mean in any of your houses, but in a barn, or some such place. If the physic comes before the doctor, get somebody to dose the child. And don't fancy you are all going to die of the fever. That is the way to make yourselves ill; and it is all nonsense, too, I dare say."

"Do you like that gentleman?" asked Moss, sapiently, when the train was whirling Mr. Nelson out of sight. "Because I don't--not at all."

"I believe he is kinder than he means, Moss. He need not be so rough;

but I know he does kind things sometimes.”

“But, do you like him?”

“No, I can’t say I do.”

Before many hours were over, Fleming was sorry that he had admitted this, even to himself; and for many days after he was occasionally heard telling Moss what a good gentleman Mr. Nelson was, for all his roughness of manners. With the utmost speed, before it would have been thought possible, arrived a surgeon from the next town, with medicines, and the news that he was to come every day while there was any fear of fever. The gypsies were to have been cared for; but they were gone. The marks of their fire and a few stray feathers which showed that a fowl had been plucked, alone told where they had encamped. A neighbor, who loved her poultry yard, was heard to say that the sick child would not die for want of chicken broth, she would be bound; and the nearest farmer asked if they had left any potato-peels and turnip tops for his pig. He thought that was the least they could do after making their famous gypsy stew (a capital dish, it was said) from his vegetables. They were gone; and if they had not left fever behind, they might be forgiven, for the sake of the benefit of taking themselves off. After the search for the gypsies was over, there was still an unusual stir about the place. One and another stranger appeared and examined the low grounds, and sent for one and another of the neighboring proprietors, whether farmer, or builder, or gardener, or laborer; for every one who owned or rented a yard of land on the borders of the great ditch, or anywhere near the clay-pits or osier-beds.

It was the opinion of the few residents near the Station that something would be done to improve the place before another year; and everybody said that it must be Mr. Nelson’s doings, and that it was a thousand pities that he did not come earlier, before the fever had crept thus far along the line.

V.

For some months past, Becky had believed without a doubt, that the day of her return home would be the very happiest day of her life. She was too young to know yet that it is not for us to settle which of our days shall be happy ones, nor what events shall yield us joy. The promise had not been kept that she should return when her father and mother removed into the new cottage. She had been told that there really was not, even now, decent room for them all; and that they must at least wait till the hot weather was completely over before they crowded the chamber, as they had hitherto done. And then, when autumn came on, and the creeping mists from the low grounds hung round the place from sunset till after breakfast the next day, the mother delayed sending for her daughter,

unwilling that she should lose the look of health which she alone now, of all the family, exhibited. Fleming and his wife and babe prospered better than the others. The young man's business lay on the high ground, at the top of the embankment. He was there all day while Mr. Woodruffe and Allan were below, among the ditches and the late and early fogs. Mrs. Fleming was young and strong, full of spirit and happiness; and so far fortified against the attacks of disease, as a merry heart strengthens nerve and bone and muscle, and invigorates all the vital powers. In regard to her family, her father's hopeful spirit seemed to have passed into her. While he was becoming permanently discouraged, she was always assured that everything would come right next year. The time had arrived for her power of hope to be tested to the utmost. One day this autumn, she admitted that Becky must be sent for. She did not forget, however, to charge Allan to be cheerful, and make the best of things, and not frighten Becky by the way.

It was now the end of October. Some of the days were balmy elsewhere--the afternoons ruddy; the leaves crisp beneath the tread; the squirrel busy after the nuts in the wood; the pheasants splendid among the dry ferns in the brake, the sportsman warm and thirsty in his exploring among the stubble. In the evenings the dwellers in country houses called one another out upon the grass, to see how bright the stars were, and how softly the moonlight slept upon the woods. While it was thus in one place, in another, and not far off, all was dank, dim, dreary and unwholesome; with but little sun, and no moon or stars; all chill, and no glow; no stray perfumes, the last of the year, but sickly scents coming on the steam from below. Thus it was about Fleming's house, this latter end of October, when he saw but little of his wife, because she was nursing her mother in the fever, and when he tried to amuse himself with his young baby at meal-times (awkward nurse as he was) to relieve his wife of the charge for the little time he could be at home. When the baby cried, and when he saw his Abby look wearied, he did wish, now and then, that Becky was at home; but he was patient, and helpful, and as cheerful as he could be, till the day which settled the matter. On that morning he felt strangely weak, barely able to mount the steps to the station. During the morning, several people told him he looked ill; and one person did more. The porter sent a message to the next large Station that somebody must be sent immediately to fill Fleming's place, in case of his being too ill to work. Somebody came; and before that, Fleming was in bed--certainly down in the fever. His wife was now wanted at home; and Becky must come to her mother.

Though Becky asked questions all the way home, and Allan answered them as truthfully as he knew how, she was not prepared for what she found--her father aged and bent, always in pain, more or less, and far less furnished with plans and hopes than she had ever known him; Moss, fretful and sickly, and her mother unable to turn herself in her bed. Nobody mentioned death. The surgeon who came daily, and told Becky exactly what to do, said nothing of anybody dying of the fever, while

Woodruffe was continually talking of things that were to be done when his wife got well again. It was sad, and sometimes alarming, to hear the strange things that Mrs. Woodruffe said in the evenings when she was delirious; but if Abby stepped in at such times, she did not think much of it, did not look upon it as any sign of danger; and was only thankful that her husband had no delirium. His head was always clear, she said, though he was very weak. Becky never doubted, after this, that her mother was the most severely ill of the two; and she was thunderstruck when she heard one morning the surgeon's answers to her father's questions about Fleming. He certainly considered it a bad case; he would not say that he could not get through; but he must say it was contrary to his expectation. When Becky saw her father's face as he turned away and went out, she believed his heart was broken.

"But I thought," said she to the surgeon, "I thought my mother was most ill of the two."

"I don't know that," was the reply, "but she is very ill. We are doing the best we can. You are, I am sure," he said, kindly; "and we must hope on, and do our best till a change comes. The wisest of us do not know what changes may come. But I could not keep your father in ignorance of what may happen in the other house."

No appearances alarmed Abby. Because there was no delirium, she apprehended no danger. Even when the fatal twitchings came, the arm twitching as it lay upon the coverlid, she did not know it was a symptom of anything. As she nursed her husband perfectly well, and could not have been made more prudent and watchful by any warning, she had no warning. Her cheerfulness was encouraged, for her infant's sake, as well as for her husband's and her own. Some thought that her husband knew his own case. A word or two,--now a gesture, and now a look,--persuaded the surgeon and Woodruffe that he was aware that he was going. His small affairs were always kept settled; he had probably no directions to give; and his tenderness for his wife showed itself in his enjoying her cheerfulness to the last. When, as soon as it was light, one December morning, Moss was sent to ask if Abby could possibly come for a few minutes, because mother was worse, he found his sister alone, looking at the floor, her hands on her lap, though her baby was fidgetting in its cradle. Fleming's face was covered, and he lay so still that Moss, who had never seen death, felt sure that all was over. The boy hardly knew what to do; and his sister seemed not to hear what he said. The thought of his mother,--that Abby's going might help or save her,--moved him to act. He kissed Abby, and said she must please go to mother; and he took the baby out of the cradle, and wrapped it up, and put it into its mother's arms; and fetched Abby's bonnet, and took her cloak down from its peg, and opened the door for her, saying, that he would stay and take care of everything. His sister went without a word; and, as soon as he had closed the door behind her, Moss sank down on his knees before the chair where she had been sitting, and hid his face there till some

one came for him,--to see his mother once more before she died.

As the two coffins were carried out, to be conveyed to the churchyard together, Mr. Nelson, who had often been backward and forward during the last six weeks, observed to the surgeon that the death of such a man as Fleming was a dreadful loss.

“It is that sort of men that the fever cuts off,” said the surgeon.

“The strong man, in the prime of life, at his best period, one may say, for himself and for society, is taken away,--leaving wife and child helpless and forlorn. That is the ravage that the fever makes.”

“Well; would not people tell you that it is our duty to submit?” asked Mr. Nelson, who could not help showing some emotion by voice and countenance.

“Submit!” said the surgeon. “That depends on what the people mean who use the word. If you or I were ill of the fever, we must resign ourselves, as cheerfully as we could. But if you ask me whether we should submit to see more of our neighbors cut off by fever as these have been, I can only ask in return, whose doing it is that they are living in a swamp, and whether that is to go on? Who dug the clay pits? Who let that ditch run abroad, and make a filthy bog? Are you going to charge that upon Providence and talk of submitting to the consequences? If so, that is not my religion.”

“No, no. There is no religion in that,” replied Mr. Nelson, for once agreeing in what was said to him. “It must be looked to.”

“It must,” said the surgeon, as decidedly as if he had been a railway director, or king and parliament in one.

VI.

“I wonder whether there is a more forlorn family in England than we are now,” said Woodruffe, as he sat among his children, a few hours after the funeral.

His children were glad to hear him speak, however gloomy might be his tone. His silence had been so terrible that nothing that he could say could so weigh upon their hearts. His words, however, brought out his widowed daughter’s tears again. She was sewing--her infant lying in her lap. As her tears fell upon its face, it moved and cried. Becky came and took it up, and spoke cheerfully to it. The cheerfulness seemed to be the worst of all. Poor Abby laid her forehead to the back of her chair, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

“Ay, Abby,” said her father, “your heart is breaking, and mine too. You

and I can go to our rest, like those that have gone before us; but I have to think of what will become of these young things.”

“Yes, father,” said Becky gently, but with a tone of remonstrance, “you must endeavor to live, and not make up your mind to dying, because life has grown heavy and sad.”

“My dear, I am ill--very ill. It is not merely that life is grown intolerable to me. I am sure I could not live long in such misery of mind; but I am breaking up fast.”

The young people looked at each other in dismay. There was something worse than the grief conveyed by their father’s words in the hopeless daring--the despair--of his tone when he ventured to say that life was unendurable.

Becky had the child on one arm; with the other hand she took down her father’s plaid from its peg, and put it round his rheumatic shoulders, whispering in his ear a few words about desiring that God’s will should be done.

“My dear,” he replied, “it was I who taught you that lesson when you were a child on my knee, and it would be strange if I forgot it when I want so much any comfort that I can get. But I don’t believe (and if you ask the clergyman, he will tell you that he does not believe) that it is God’s will that we, or any other people, should be thrust into a swamp like this, scarcely fit for the rats and the frogs to live in. It is man’s doing, not God’s, that the fever makes such havoc as it has made with us. The fever does not lay waste healthy places.”

“Then why are we here?” Allan ventured to say. “Father, let us go.”

“Go! I wonder how or where! I can’t go, or let any of you go. I have not a pound in the world to spend in moving, or in finding new employment. And if I had, who would employ me? Who would not laugh at a crippled old man asking for work and wages?”

“Then, father, we must see what we can do here, and you must not forbid us to say ‘God’s will be done!’ If we cannot go away, it must be His will that we should stay and have as much hope and courage as we can.”

Woodruffe threw himself back in his chair. It was too much to expect that he would immediately rally; but he let the young people confer, and plan, and cheer each other.

The first thing to be done, they agreed, was to move hither, whenever the dismal rain would permit it, all Abby’s furniture that could not be disposed of to her husband’s successors. It would fit up the lower room. And Allan and Becky settled how the things could stand so as to make it

at once a bed-room and sitting-room. If, as Abby had said, she meant to try to get some scholars, and keep a little school, room must be left to seat the children.

“Keep a school?” exclaimed Woodruffe, looking round at Abby.

“Yes, father,” said Abby, raising her head. “That seems to be a thing that I can do; and it will be good for me to have something to do. Becky is the stoutest of us all, and....”

“I wonder how long that will last,” groaned the father.

“I am quite stout now,” said Becky; “and I am the one to help Allan with the garden. Allan and I will work under your direction, father, while your rheumatism lasts; and....”

“And what am I to do?” asked Moss, pushing himself in.

“You shall fetch and carry the tools,” said Becky; “that is, when the weather is fine, and when your chilblains are not very bad. And you shall be bird-boy when the sowing season comes on.”

“And we are going to put up a pent-house for you, in one corner, you know, Moss,” said his brother. “And we will make it so that there shall be room for a fire in it, where father and you may warm yourselves, and always have dry shoes ready.”

“I wonder what our shoe leather will have cost us by the time the spring comes,” observed Woodruffe. “There is not a place where we ever have to take the cart or the barrow that is not all mire and ruts; not a path in the whole garden that I call a decent one. Our shoes are all pulled to pieces; while the frost, or the fog, or something or other, prevents our getting any real work done. The waste is dreadful. Nothing should have made me take a garden where none but summer crops are to be had, if I could have foreseen such a thing. I never saw such a thing before,--never--as market-gardening without winter and spring crops. Never heard of such a thing!”

Becky glanced towards Allan, to see if he had nothing to propose. If they could neither mend the place nor leave it, it did seem a hard case. Allan was looking into the fire, musing. When Moss announced that the rain was over, Allan started, and said he must be fetching some of Abby’s things down, if it was fair. Becky really meant to help him; but she also wanted opportunity for consultation, as to whether it could really be God’s will that they should neither be able to mend their condition nor to escape from it. As they mounted the long flight of steps, they saw Mr. Nelson issue from the Station, looking about him to ascertain if the rain was over, and take his stand on the embankment, followed by a gentleman who had a roll of paper in his hand. As they

stood, the one was seen to point with his stick, and the other with his roll of paper, this way and that. Allan set off in that direction, saying to his sister, as he went,

“Don’t you come. That gentleman is so rude, he will make you cry. Yes, I must go, and I won’t get angry; I won’t indeed. He may find as much fault as he pleases; I must show him how the water is standing in our furrows.”

“Hallo! what do you want here?” was Mr. Nelson’s greeting, when, after a minute or two, he saw Allan looking and listening. “What business have you here, hearkening to what we are saying?”

“I wanted to know whether anything is going to be done below there. I thought, if you wished it, I could tell you something about it.”

“You! what, a dainty little fellow like you?--a fellow that wears his Sunday clothes on a Tuesday, and a rainy Tuesday too! You must get working clothes and work.”

“I shall work to-morrow, Sir. My mother and my brother-in-law were buried to-day.”

“Lord bless me! You should have told me that. How should I know that unless you told me?” He proceeded in a much gentler tone, however, merely remonstrating with Allan for letting the wet stand in the furrows, in such a way as would spoil any garden. Allan had a good ally, all the while, in the stranger, who seemed to understand everything before it was explained. The gentleman was, in fact, an agricultural surveyor--one who could tell, when looking abroad from a height, what was swamp and what meadow; where there was a clean drain, and where an uneven ditch; where the soil was likely to be watered, and where flooded by the winter rains; where genially warmed, and where fatally baked by the summer’s sun. He had seen, before Allan pointed it out, how the great ditch cut across between the cultivated grounds and the little river into which those grounds should be drained; but he could not know, till told by Allan, who were the proprietors and occupiers of the parcels of land lying on either side the ditch. Mr. Nelson knew little or nothing under this head, though he contradicted the lad every minute; was sure such an one did not live here, nor another there; told him he was confusing Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown; did not believe a word of Mr. Taylor having bought yonder meadow, or Mrs. Scott now renting that field. All the while, the surveyor went on setting down the names as Allan told them; and then observed that they were not so many but that they might combine, if they would, to drain their properties, if they could be relieved of the obstruction of the ditch--if the surveyor of highways would see that the ditch were taken in hand. Mr. Nelson pronounced that there should be no difficulty about the ditch, if the rest could be managed; and then, after a few whispered words between the

gentlemen, Allan was asked first, whether he was sure that he knew where every person lived whose name was down in the surveyor's book; and next, whether he would act as guide to-morrow. For a moment he thought he should be wanted to move Abby's things; but, remembering the vast importance of the plan which seemed now to be fairly growing under his eye, he replied that he would go; he should be happy to make it his day's work to help, ever so little, towards what he wished above everything in the world.

"What makes you in such a hurry to suppose we want to get a day's work out of you for nothing?" asked Mr. Nelson. He thrust half-a-crown into the lad's waistcoat pocket, saying that he must give it back again, if he led the gentleman wrong. The gentleman had no time to go running about the country on a fool's errand; Allan must mind that. As Allan touched his hat, and ran down the steps, Mr. Nelson observed that boys with good hearts did not fly about in that way, as if they were merry, on the day of their mother's funeral.

"Perhaps he is rather thinking of saving his father," observed the surveyor.

"Well; save as many of them as you can. They seem all going to pot as it is."

When Allan burst in, carrying nothing of Abby's, but having a little color in his cheeks for once, his father sat up in his chair, the baby suddenly stopped crying, and Moss asked where he had been. At first, his father disappointed him by being listless--first refusing to believe anything good, and then saying that any good that could happen now was too late; and Abby could not help crying all the more because this was not thought about a year sooner. It was her poor husband that had made the stir; and now they were going to take his advice the very day that he was laid in his grave. They all tried to comfort her, and said how natural it was that she should feel it so; yet, amidst all their sympathy, they could not help being cheered that something was to be done at last.

By degrees, and not slow degrees, Woodruffe became animated. It was surprising how many things he desired Allan to be sure not to forget to point out to the surveyor, and to urge upon those he was to visit. At last he said he would go himself. It was a very serious business, and he ought to make an effort to have it done properly. It was a great effort, but he would make it. Not rheumatism, nor anything else, should keep him at home. Allan was glad at heart to see such signs of energy in his father, though he might feel some natural disappointment at being left at home, and some perplexity as to what, in that case, he ought to do about the half-crown, if Mr. Nelson should be gone home. The morning settled this, however. The surveyor was in his gig. If Allan could hang on, or keep up with it, it would be very well, as he would be wanted to

open the gates, and to lead the way in places too wet for his father, who was not worth such a pair of patent waterproof tall boots as the surveyor had on.

The circuit was not a very wide one; yet it was dark before they got home. There are always difficulties in arrangements which require combined action. Here there were different levels in the land, and different tempers and views among the occupiers. Mr. Brown had heard nothing about the matter, and could not be hurried till he saw occasion. Mr. Taylor liked his field best, wet--would not have it drier on any account, for fear of the summer sun. When assured that drought took no hold on well-dried land in comparison with wet land, he shook with laughter, and asked if they expected him to believe that. Mrs. Scott, whose combination with two others was essential to the drainage of three portions, would wait another year. They must go on without her; and after another year, she would see what she would do. Another had drained his land in his own way long ago, and did not expect that anybody would ask him to put his spade into another man's land, or to let any other man put his spade into his. These were all the obstructions. Everybody else was willing, or at least, not obstructive. By clever management, it was thought that the parties concerned could make an island of Mrs. Scott and her field, and win over Mr. Brown by the time he was wanted, and show Mr. Taylor that, as his field could no longer be as wet as it had been, he might as well try the opposite condition--they promising to flood his field as often and as thoroughly as he pleased, if he found it the worse for being drained. They could not obtain all they wished, where everybody was not as wise as could be wished; but so much was agreed upon as made the experienced surveyor think that the rest would follow; enough, already, to set more laborers to work than the place could furnish. Two or three stout men were sent from a distance; and when they had once cut a clear descent from the ditch to the river, and had sunk the ditch to seven feet deep, and made the bottom even, and narrowed it to three feet, it was a curious thing to see how ready the neighbors became to unite their drains with it. It used to be said, that here--however it might be elsewhere--the winter was no time for digging; but that must have meant that no winter-digging would bring a spring crop; and that therefore it was useless. Now, the sound of the spade never ceased for the rest of the winter; and the laborers thought it the best winter they had ever known for constant work. Those who employed the labor hoped it would answer--found it expensive--must trust it was all right, and would yield a profit by and by. As for the Woodruffes, they were too poor to employ laborers. But some little hope had entered their hearts again, and brought strength, not only to their hearts, but to their very limbs. They worked like people beginning the world. As poor Abby could keep the house and sew, while attending to her little school, Becky did the lighter parts (and some which were far from light) of the garden work, finding easy tasks for Moss; and Allan worked like a man at the drains. They had been called good drains before; but now, there was an outfall for deeper

ones; and deeper they must be made. Moreover, a strong rivalry arose among the neighbors about their respective portions of the combined drainage; and under the stimulus of ambition, Woodruffe recovered his spirits and the use of his limbs wonderfully. He suffered cruelly from his rheumatism; and in the evenings felt as if he could never more lift a spade; yet, not the less was he at work again in the morning, and so sanguine as to the improvement of his ground, that it was necessary to remind him, when calculating his gains, that it would take two years, at least, to prove the effects of his present labors.

VII.

It was observed by Woodruffe's family, during one week of spring of the next year, that he was very absent. He was not in low spirits, but absorbed in thought, and much devoted to making calculations with pencil and paper. At last, out it came, one morning at breakfast.

"I wonder how we should all like to have Harry Hardiman to work with us again?"

Every one looked up. Harry! where was Harry? Was he here? Was he coming?

"Why, I will tell you what I have been thinking," said their father. "I have thought long and carefully, and I believe I have made up my mind to send for Harry, to come and work for us as he used to do. We have not labor enough on the ground. Two stout men to the acre is the smallest allowance for trying what could be made of the place."

"That is what Taylor and Brown are employing now on the best part of their land," said Allan; "that is, when they can get the labor. There is such difference between that and one man to four or five acres, as there was before, that they can't always get the labor."

"Just so; and therefore," continued Woodruffe, "I am thinking of sending for Harry. Our old neighborhood was not prosperous when we left it, and I fancy it cannot have improved since; and Harry might be glad to follow his master to a thriving neighborhood; and he is such a careful fellow that I dare say he has money for the journey,--even if he has a wife by this time, as I suppose he has."

Moss looked most pleased, where all were pleased, at the idea of seeing Harry again. His remembrance of Harry was of a tall young man, who used to carry him on his shoulders, and wheel him in the empty water-barrel, and sometimes offer to dip him into it when it was full, and show him how to dig in the sand-heap with his little wooden spade.

"Your rent, to be sure, is much lower than in the old place," observed Abby.

“Why, we must not build upon that,” replied the father; “rent is rising here, and will rise. My landlord was considerate in lowering mine to £3 per acre, when he saw how impossible it was to make it answer; and he says he shall not ask more yet on account of the labor I laid out at the time of the drainage. But when I have partly repaid myself, the rent will rise to £5; and, in fact, I have made my calculations in regard to Harry’s coming at a higher rent than that.”

“Higher than that?”

“Yes; I should not be surprised if I found myself paying, as market-gardeners near London do, ten pounds per acre before I die.”

“Or rather, to let the ground to me for that, father,” said Allan, “when it is your own property, and you are tired of work, and disposed to turn it over to me. I will pay you ten pounds per acre then, and let you have all the cabbages you can eat besides. It is capital land, and that is the truth. Come--shall that be a bargain?”

Woodruffe smiled, and said he owed a duty to Allan. He did not like to see him so hard worked as to be unable to take due care of his own corner of the garden;--unable to enter fairly into the competition for the prizes at the Horticultural Show in the summer. Becky now, too, ought to be spared from all but occasional help in the garden. Above all, the ground was now in such an improving state that it would be waste not to bestow due labor upon it. Put in the spade where you would, the soil was loose and well-aired as needs be: the manure penetrated it thoroughly; the frost and heat pulverized, instead of binding it; and the crops were succeeding each other so fast, that the year would be a very profitable one.

“Where will Harry live, if he comes?” asked Abby.

“We must get another cottage added to the new row. Easily done! Cottages so healthy as these new ones pay well. Good rents are offered for them,--to save doctors’ bills and loss of time from sickness;--and, when once a system of house-drainage is set a-going, it costs scarcely more in adding a cottage to a group, to make it all right, than to run it up upon solid clay as used to be the way here. Well, I have a good mind to write to Harry to-day. What do you think of it,--all of you?”

Fortified by the opinion of all his children, Mr. Woodruffe wrote to Harry. Meantime, Allan and Becky went to cut the vegetables that were for sale that day; and Moss delighted himself in running after and catching the pony in the meadow below. The pony was not very easily caught, for it was full of spirit. Instead of the woolly insipid grass that it used to crop, and which seemed to give it only fever and no nourishment, it now fed on sweet fresh grass, which had no sour stagnant

water soaking its roots. The pony was so full of play this morning that Moss could not get hold of it. Though much stronger than a year ago, he was not yet anything like so robust as a boy of his age should be; and he was growing heated, and perhaps a little angry, as the pony galloped off towards some distant trees, when a boy started up behind a bush, caught the halter, brought the pony round with a twitch, and led him to Moss. Moss fancied he had seen the boy before, and then his white teeth reminded Moss of one thing after another.

"I came for some marsh plants," said the boy. "You and I got plenty once somewhere hereabouts, but I cannot find them now."

"You will not find any now. We have no marsh now."

The stranger said he dared not go back without them; mother wanted them badly. She would not believe him if he said he could not find any. There were plenty about two miles off, along the railway, among the clay-pits, he was told; but none nearer. The boy wanted to know where the clay-pits hereabouts were. He could not find one of them.

"I will show you one of them," said Moss; "the one where you and I used to hunt rats." And, leading the pony, he showed his old gypsy play-fellow all the improvements, beginning with the great ditch,--now invisible from being covered in. While it was open, he said, it used to get choked, and the sides were plastered after rain, and soon became grass-grown, so that it was found worth while to cover it in; and now it would want little looking to for years to come. As for the clay-pit, where the rats used to pop in and out,--it was now a manure-pit, covered in. There was a drain into it from the pony's stable and from the pig-styes; and it was near enough to the garden to receive the refuse and sweepings. A heavy lid, with a ring in the middle, covered the pit, so that nobody could fall in in the dark, and no smell could get out. Moss begged the boy to come a little further, and he would show him his own flower-bed; and when the boy was there, he was shown everything else: what a cart-load of vegetables lay cut for sale; and what an arbor had been made of the pent-house under which Moss used to take shelter, when he could do nothing better than keep off the birds; and how fine the ducks were,--the five ducks that were so serviceable in eating off the slugs; and what a comfortable nest had been made for them to lay their eggs in, beside the water-tank in the corner; and what a variety of scarecrows the family had invented,--each having one, to try which would frighten the sparrows most. While Moss was telling how difficult it was to deal with the sparrows, because they could not be frightened for more than three days by any kind of scarecrow, he heard Allan calling him, in a tone of vexation, at being kept waiting so long. In an instant the stranger boy was off,--leaping the gate, and flying along the meadow till he was hidden behind a hedge.

Two or three days after this one of the ducks was missing. The last time

that the five had been seen together was when Moss was showing them to his visitor. The morning after Moss finally gave up hope, the glass of Allan's hotbed was found broken, and in the midst of the bed itself was a deep foot-track, crushing the cucumber plants, and, with them, Allan's hopes of a cucumber prize at the Horticultural Exhibition in the summer. On more examination, more mischief was discovered, some cabbages had been stolen, and another duck was missing. In the midst of the general concern, Woodruffe burst out a-laughing. It struck him that the chief of the scarecrows had changed his hat; and so he had. The old straw hat which used to flap in the wind so serviceably was gone, and in its stead appeared a helmet,--a saucepan full of holes, battered and split, but still fit to be a helmet to a scarecrow.

"I could swear to the old hat," observed Woodruffe, "if I should have the luck to see it on anybody's head."

"And so could I," said Becky, "for I mended it,--bound it with black behind, and green before, because I had not green ribbon enough. But nobody would wear it before our eyes."

"That is why I suspect there are strangers hovering about. We must watch."

Now Moss, for the first time, bethought himself of the boy he had brought in from the meadow; and now, for the first time, he told his family of that encounter.

"I never saw such a simpleton," his father declared. "There, go along and work! Now, don't cry, but hold up like a man and work."

Moss did cry; he could not help it; but he worked too. He would fain have been one of the watchers, moreover; but his father said he was too young. For two nights he was ordered to bed, when Allan took his dark lantern, and went down to the pent-house; the first night accompanied by his father, and the next by Harry Hardiman, who had come on the first summons. By the third evening, Moss was so miserable that his sisters interceded for him, and he was allowed to go down with his old friend Harry.

It was a starlight night, without a moon. The low country lay dim, but unobscured by mist. After a single remark on the fineness of the night, Harry was silent. Silence was their first business. They stole round the fence as if they had been thieves themselves, listened for some time before they let themselves in at the gate, passed quickly in, and locked the gate (the lock of which had been well oiled), went behind every screen, and along every path, to be sure that no one was there, and finally, perceiving that the remaining ducks were safe, settled themselves in the darkness of the pent-house.

There they sat, hour after hour, listening. If there had been no sound, perhaps they could not have borne the effort; but the sense was relieved by the bark of a dog at a distance, and then by the hoot of the owl that was known to have done them good service in mousing, many a time; and once, by the passage of a train on the railway above. When these were all over, poor Moss had much ado to keep awake, and at last his head sank on Harry's shoulder, and he forgot where he was, and everything else in the world. He was awakened by Harry's moving, and then whispering quite into his ear:--

"Sit you still. I hear somebody yonder. No--sit you still. I won't go far--not out of call; but I must get between them and the gate."

With his lantern under his coat, Harry stole forth, and Moss stood up, all alone in the darkness and stillness. He could hear his heart beat, but nothing else, till footsteps on the path came nearer and nearer. They came quite up; they came in, actually into the arbor; and then the ducks were certainly fluttering. In an instant more, there was a gleam of light upon the white plumage of the ducks, and then light enough to show that this was the gypsy boy, with a dark lantern hung round his neck, and, at the same moment, to show the gypsy boy that Moss was there. The two boys stood, face to face, motionless from utter amazement, and the ducks had scuttled and waddled away before they recovered themselves. Then, Moss flew at him in a glorious passion, at once of rage and fear.

"Leave him to me, Moss," cried Harry, casting light upon the scene from his lantern, while he collared the thief with the other hand. "Let go, I say, Moss. There, now we'll go round and be sure whether there is any one else in the garden, and then we'll lodge this young rogue where he will be safe."

Nobody was there, and they went home in the dawn, locked up the thief in the shed, and slept through what remained of the night.

It was about Mr. Nelson's usual time for coming down the line; and it was observed that he now always stopped at this station till the next train passed,--probably because it was a pleasure to him to look upon the improvement of the place. It was no surprise therefore to Woodruffe to see him standing on the embankment after breakfast; and it was natural that Mr. Nelson should be immediately told that the gypsies were here again, and how one of them was caught thieving.

"Thieving! So you found some of your property upon him, did you!"

"Why, no. I thought myself that it was a pity that Moss did not let him alone till he had laid hold of a duck or something."

"Pho! pho! don't tell me you can punish the boy for theft, when you

can't prove that he stole anything. Give him a whipping, and let him go."

"With all my heart. It will save me much trouble to finish off the matter so."

Mr. Nelson seemed to have some curiosity about the business; for he accompanied Woodruffe to the shed. The boy seemed to feel no awe of the great man whom he supposed to be a magistrate, and when asked whether he felt none, he giggled and said "No;" he had seen the gentleman more afraid of his mother than anybody ever was of him, he fancied. On this, a thought struck Mr. Nelson. He would now have his advantage of the gypsy woman, and might enjoy, at the same time, an opportunity of studying human nature under stress--a thing he liked, when the stress was not too severe. So he passed a decree on the spot that, it being now nine o'clock, the boy should remain shut up without food till noon, when he should be severely flogged, and driven from the neighborhood; and with this pleasant prospect before him, the young rogue remained, whistling ostentatiously, while his enemies locked the door upon him.

"Did you hear him shoot the bolt?" asked Woodruffe. "If he holds to that, I don't know how I shall get at him at noon."

"There, now, what fools people are! Why did you not take out the bolt? A pretty constable you would make! Come--come this way. I am going to find the gypsy-tent again. You are wondering that I am not afraid of the woman, I see; but, you observe, I have a hold over her this time. What do you mean by allowing those children to gather about your door? You ought not to permit it."

"They are only the scholars. Don't you see them going in? My daughter keeps a little school, you know, since her husband's death."

"Ah, poor thing! poor thing!" said Mr. Nelson, as Abby appeared on the threshold, calling the children in.

Mr. Nelson always contrived to see some one or more of the family when he visited the station; but it so happened, that he had never entered the door of their dwelling. Perhaps he was not himself fully conscious of the reason. It was, that he could not bear to see Abby's young face within the widow's cap, and to be thus reminded that hers was a case of cruel wrong; that if the most ordinary thought and care had been used in preparing the place for human habitation, her husband might be living now, and she the happy creature that she would never be again.

On his way to the gypsies, Mr. Nelson saw some things that pleased him in his heart, though he found fault with them all. What business had Woodruffe with an additional man in his garden? It could not possibly answer. If it did not, the fellow must be sent away again. He must not

burden the parish. The occupiers here seemed all alike. Such a fancy for new labor! One, two, six men at work on the land within sight at that moment, over and above what there used to be! It must be looked to. Humph! he could get to the alders dryshod now; but that was owing solely to the warmth of the spring. It was nonsense to attribute everything to drainage. Drainage was a good thing; but fine weather was better.

The gypsy-tent was found behind the alders as before, but no longer in a swamp. The woman was sitting on the ground at the entrance as before, but not now with a fevered child laid across her knees. She was weaving a basket.

“Oh, I see,” said Woodruffe, “this is the way our osiers go.”

“You have not many to lose, now-a-days,” said the woman.

“You are welcome to all the rushes you can find,” said Woodruffe; “but where is your son?”

Some change of countenance was seen in the woman; but she answered carelessly that the children were playing yonder.

“The one I mean is not there,” said Woodruffe, “We have him safe--caught him stealing my ducks.”

She called the boy a villain--disowned him, and so forth; but when she found the case a hopeless one, she did not, and, therefore, probably could not scold--that is, anybody but herself and her husband. She cursed herself for coming into this silly place, where now no good was to be got. When she was brought to the right point of perplexity about what to do, seeing that it would not do to stay, and being unable to go while her boy was in durance, she was told that his punishment should be summary, though severe, if she would answer frankly certain questions. When she had once begun giving her confidence, she seemed to enjoy the license. When her husband came up, he looked as if he only waited for the departure of his visitors to give his wife the same amount of thrashing that her son was awaiting elsewhere. She vowed that they would never pitch their tent here again. It used to be the best station in their whole round--the fogs were so thick! From sunset to long after sunrise, it had been as good as a winter night, for going where they pleased without fear of prying eyes. There was not a poultry-yard or pig-stye within a couple of miles round, where they could not creep up through the fog. And they escaped the blame, too; for the swamp and ditches used to harbor so much vermin, that the gypsies were not always suspected, as they were now. Till lately, people shut themselves into their homes, or the men went to the public-house in the chill evenings; and there was little fear of meeting any one. But now that the fogs were gone, people were out in their gardens, on these fine evenings, and

there were men in the meadows, returning from fishing; for they could angle now, when their work was done, without the fear of catching an ague in the marsh as they went home.

Mr. Nelson used vigorously his last opportunity of lecturing these people. He had it all his own way, for the humility of the gypsies was edifying. Woodruffe fancied he saw some finger-talk passing, the while, though the gypsies never looked at each other, or raised their eyes from the ground. Woodruffe had to remind the Director that the whistle of the next train would soon be heard; and this brought the lecture to an abrupt conclusion. On his finishing off with, "I expect, therefore, that you will remember my advice, and never show your face here again, and that you will take to a proper course of life in future, and bring up your son to honest industry;" the woman, with a countenance of grief, seized one hand and covered it with kisses, and the husband took the other hand and pressed it to his breast.

"We must make haste," observed Mr. Nelson, as he led the way quickly back; "but I think I have made some impression upon them. You see now the right way to treat these people. I don't think you will see them here again."

"I don't think we shall."

As he reached the steps the whistle was heard, and Mr. Nelson could only wave his hand to Woodruffe, rush up the embankment, and throw himself panting into a carriage. Only just in time!

By an evening train he re-appeared. When thirty miles off, he had wanted his purse, and it was gone. It had no doubt paid for the gypsies' final gratitude.

Of course, a sufficient force was immediately sent to the alder clump; but there was nothing there but some charred sticks, and some clean pork bones, this time, instead of feathers of fowls, and a cabbage leaf or two. The boy had had his whipping at noon, after a conference with his little brother at the keyhole, which had caused him to withdraw the bolt, and offer no resistance. Considering his cries and groans, he had run off with surprising agility, and was now, no doubt, far away.

VIII.

The gypsies came no more. The fogs came no more. The fever came no more, at least, in such a form as to threaten the general safety. Where it still lingered, it was about those only who deserved it,--in any small farm-house, where the dung-yard was too near the house; and in some cottage where the slatternly inmates did not mind a green puddle or choked ditch within reach of their noses. More dwellings arose, as the

fertility of the land increased, and invited a higher kind of tillage; and among the prettiest of them was one which stood in the corner,--the most sunny corner,--of Woodruffe's paddock. Harry Hardiman and his wife and child lived there, and the cottage was Woodruffe's property.

Yet Woodruffe's rent had been raised, and pretty rapidly. He was now paying eight pounds per acre for his garden-ground, and half that for what was out of the limits of the garden. He did not complain of it; for he was making money fast. His skill and industry deserved this; but skill and industry could not have availed without opportunity. His ground once allowed to show what it was worth, he treated it well; and it answered well to the treatment. By the railway he obtained what manure he wanted from the town; and he sent it back by the railway to town in the form of crisp celery and salads, wholesome potatoes and greens, luscious strawberries, and sweet and early peas. He knew that a Surrey gardener had made his ground yield a profit of two hundred and twenty pounds per acre. He thought that, with his inferior market, he should do well to make his yield one hundred and fifty pounds per acre; and this, by close perseverance, he attained. He could have done it more easily if he had enjoyed good health; but he never enjoyed good health again. His rheumatism had fixed itself too firmly to be entirely removed; and for many days in the year, he was compelled to remain within doors, or to saunter about in the sun, seeing his boys and Harry at work, but unable to help them.

From the time that Allan's work became worth wages in addition to his subsistence, his father let him rent half a rood of the garden-ground for three years, saying--

"I limit it to three years, my boy, because that term is long enough for you to show what you can do. After three years, I shall not be able to spare the ground at any rent. If you fail, you have no business to rent ground. If you succeed, you will have money in your pocket wherewith to hire land elsewhere. Now you have to show us what you can do."

"Yes, father," was Allan's short but sufficient reply.

It was observed by the family that, from this time forward, Allan's eye was on every plot of ground in the neighborhood which could, by possibility, ever be offered for hire; yet did his attention never wander from that which was already under his hand. And that which was so great an object to him became a sort of pursuit to the whole family. Moss guarded Allan's frames, and made more and more prodigious scarecrows. Their father gave his very best advice. Becky, who was no longer allowed, as a regular thing, to work in the garden, found many a spare half-hour for hoeing and weeding, and trimming and tying up, in Allan's beds; and Abby found, as she sat in her little school, that she could make nets for his fruit trees. It was thus no wonder that, when a certain July day in the second year arrived, the whole household was in

a state of excitement, because it was a sort of crisis in Allan's affairs.

Though breakfast was early that morning, Becky and Allan and Moss were spruce in their best clothes. A hamper stood at the door, and Allan was packing in another, which had no lid, two or three flower-pots, which presented a glorious show of blossom. Abby was putting a new ribbon on her sister's straw bonnet; and Harry was in waiting to carry up the hampers to the station. It was the day of the Horticultural Show at the town. Woodruffe had been too unwell to think of going till this morning; but now the sight of the preparations, and the prospect of a warm day, inspired him, and he thought he would go. At last he went, and they were gone. Abby never went up to the station; nobody ever asked her to go there, not even her own child, who perhaps had not thought of the possibility of it. But when the train was starting, she stood at the upper window with her child, and held him so that he might lean out, and see the last carriage disappear as it swept round the curve. After that the day seemed long, though Harry came up at the dinner-hour to say what he thought of the great gooseberry in particular, and of everything else that Allan had carried with him. It was holiday time, and there was no school to fill up the day. Before the evening, the child became restless, and Abby fell into low spirits, as she was apt to do when left long alone; so that Harry stopped suddenly at the door when he was rushing in to announce that the train was within sight.

"Shall I take the child, Miss?" said Harry. (He always called her "Miss.") "I will carry him---- But, sure, here they come! Here comes Moss,--ready to roll down the steps! My opinion is that there's a prize."

Moss was called back by a voice which everybody obeyed. Allan should himself tell his sister the fortune of the day, their father said.

There were two prizes, one of which was for the wonderful plate of gooseberries; and at this news Harry nodded, and declared himself anything but surprised. If that gooseberry had not carried the day, there would have been partiality in the judges, that was all; and nobody could suppose such a thing as that. Yet Harry could have told, if put upon his honor, that he was rather disappointed that everything that Allan carried had not gained a prize. When he mentioned one or two, his master told him he was unreasonable; and he supposed he was.

Allan laid down upon the table, for his sister's full assurance, his sovereign, and his half-sovereign, and his tickets. She turned away rather abruptly, and seemed to be looking whether the kettle was near boiling for tea. Her father went up to her; and on his first whispered words, the sob broke forth which made all look round.

"I was thinking of one, too, my dear, that I wish was here at this

moment. I can feel for you, my dear.”

“But you don’t know--you don’t know--you never knew----.” She could not go on.

“What don’t I know, my dear?”

“That he constantly blamed himself for saying anything to bring you here. He said you had never prospered from the hour you came, and now----”

And now Woodruffe could not speak, as the past came fresh upon him. In a few moments, however, he rallied, saying,

“But we must consider Allan. He must not think that his success makes us sad.”

Allan declared that it was not about gaining the prizes that he was chiefly glad. It was because it was now proved what a fair field he had before him. There was nothing that might not be done with such a soil as they had to deal with now.

Harry was quite of this opinion. There were more and more people set to work upon the soil all about them; and the more it was worked the more it yielded. He never saw a place of so much promise. And if it had a bad name in regard to healthiness, he was sure that was unfair,--or no longer fair. He and his were full of health and happiness, as they hoped to see everybody else in time; and, for his part, if he had all England before him, or the whole world, to choose a place to live in, he would choose the very place he was in, and the very cottage, and the very ground to work on that had produced such a gooseberry and such strawberries as he had seen that day.

A BURGLAR ALARM

from *Frivolities*, by Richard Marsh

I must confess that the idea appealed to Leila more strongly than it did to me. I do not deny that it struck me as original. But it does not follow that because an idea is original it is of much practical value. Leila thought that it was just the thing which was wanted to calm her condition of nervous disquietude. So, of course, I said nothing.

At that time we were living at The Larches, and had only just discovered what a striking difference there is in a house, which is nine miles away from anywhere, in the summer and in the winter. In the summer the place was a perfect paradise. The house was embowered in trees. Within a stone's-throw was a little stream, which murmured as it meandered, singing, as it were, songs of Arcady. But as the nights grew longer, and the mornings further off, it was even painful to observe what a different aspect The Larches began to wear. The winds howled through the leafless corpses of the trees like souls in agony. The stream rose till it flooded all the neighbourhood. During the long evenings the feeling of solitude was really most depressing. As Leila justly remarked, if anything happened in the dead of the night, and we were in need of assistance, where should we be? The nearest doctor was thirteen miles off. A policeman seven. The only servants we could induce to stay with us were an old woman, who was so old that she had to choose between us and the workhouse, and a young girl who had come to us out of the workhouse, and who was undoubtedly meditating returning whence she came. She said that it was livelier at the workhouse than at The Larches. Of that, personally, I have not the slightest doubt.

One day in November I was reading a paper. We did get a paper, now and then, though I trust that not many people have realised what it means to drive, in English November weather, in an open basket-carriage, perhaps eighteen miles to get one. In this paper a paragraph caught my eye, which was headed, "A Burglar Alarm." I read it. The idea of the thing was this. You were to cover the hall, and the stairs, and the banisters, and any other place where anybody was likely to tread, with open newspapers. Then, if a burglar came into the house in the middle of the night, he would step on the newspapers, and you would hear them rustle, and would know that he was there. The idea rather struck me. I mentioned it to Leila. Indeed, I read the paragraph to her there and then. She was quite ecstatic.

"We'll try it to-night," she said.

I did not see the exact _sequitur_. Nor why we should lay traps for burglars because paragraphs appeared in papers. I told her so.

"If a burglar did break in, where should we be?" she asked.

That was her favourite form of inquiry. I really could not tell her, though I strongly suspected that I, for one, should be in bed. Nor did I see how, in that respect, the situation would be altered, although the house was covered with newspapers, both within and without.

"My dear Frederic, how dense you are! Don't you understand that we should at least know that the man was there, and that would be some relief at any rate."

I was not so sure of this myself, although I did not care to interrupt her flow of eloquence to tell her so.

"I'll hunt up all the newspapers I can find, and, to-night, we'll cover the stairs."

We did. Leila is of a sanguine temperament. When she has made up her mind on a subject I generally acquiesce. I acquiesced then.

Shortly before nine, which hour, as a rule, was our bedtime at The Larches, except on those occasions when we retired earlier, we commenced our operations.

We endeavoured to enlist the servants' sympathy and assistance; but Mrs. Perkins evidently regarded the whole affair as savouring of lunacy, and Eliza did nothing else but giggle. So Leila and I had, practically, to do it all. I think that we made a very fair job of it, on the whole. We laid between a dozen and twenty newspapers down in the hall. We covered the stairs.

By the way, it was only after we had covered the stairs that we discovered that it would be difficult, not to say impossible, for anyone to ascend them without disarranging all that we had done; so as we ourselves, and Mrs. Perkins and Eliza were all below, the stairs had to be done over again. The servants went up first. We followed. And, as we followed, we covered the treads with the papers as we went. We even hung newspapers over the banisters, so that if a burglar, alarmed at the noise which he found he made by stepping on the stairs, caught hold of the banisters, he would not find that there was safety there.

I rather fancy that the preparations which we had made for an enemy who might or might not come acted on our own nervous systems.

Anyhow, hardly had we got into our bedroom and locked the door, than there came a noise as if all the newspapers we had just laid down were being stepped upon at once. And not only stepped but jumped on. Leila

was immediately in an almost painful state of agitation. I, of course, was not so much affected. Still, I own that, even to me, the thing seemed curious.

"Did you lock the door?" she gasped.

"Certainly. Didn't you see me lock it?"

"Don't let him come in!"

"Don't let who come in, my dear?"

Leila did not say. She stood listening, trembling like a leaf. All was still.

"Frederic, who can it be?"

"I think, my dear, that perhaps I had better go and inquire."

Scarcely had I spoken than there came the noise again. This time it was louder than before, and more prolonged. Leila threw her arms about my neck. She was almost in hysterics.

"Frederic, it's a burglar!"

I did not see very well how it could be. If it was, then the fellow must have been secreted in the house. He must have watched us to our bedrooms, and then have instantaneously taken advantage of the fact of our backs being turned to indulge in acrobatic performances which were scarcely in accordance with received burglarious traditions.

"Nonsense, my dear, it is nothing of the kind."

As a matter of fact, it was not. It was the cat. Or rather, to be quite accurate, the kitten. Our cat, whose name, although the animal was of the feminine persuasion, was Simon, had recently had an addition to her family. In fact, five additions. Four of them, within a very short time of their birth, had passed from life--and into a pail of water. One of them remained alive. I really cannot say why. I imagine that a white eye had something to do with the matter. The small creature was like a lump of soot, except about the region of one eye. There it was as white as the driven, or the undriven--I don't know which it is, but I know it is one or the other--snow. Leila had announced that the creature was to be named Macgregor. I can only repeat that, again, I cannot say why. Leila has a somewhat peculiar habit of naming, or, perhaps, it would be more correct to write, misnaming, the animals which come into her possession. She called the pony we had at The Larches the Duke of Liverpool. She said she did so because there was not a Duke of Liverpool. That seemed to me an

insufficient reason why the title should have been conferred upon a spavined, ill-groomed little brute, with a nasty temper, and only three sound legs to move, or, as was more frequently the case, to stand upon.

It seems that Macgregor had mistaken us. He seems to have supposed that Leila and I had occupied the better part of an hour, and taken the stiffening out of our backs, in order to provide him with a novel form of amusement, by means of which he might while away, to his own satisfaction, the witching hours of the stilly night. It appears, too, that Simon, his masculinely-named female parent, had shared in his delusion. At any rate, when Leila was beginning to think that all the burglars in England were dancing breakdowns on those newspapers, and I went out to see what really was the matter, with a revolver which was not loaded, and which never had been loaded, in one hand, and a hairbrush in the other, I found Macgregor dashing up and down the stairs in a perfect ecstasy of enjoyment, while his wretched parent, forgetting the respect which she owed to herself, and the example which she owed to him, was rushing and raging after him. I threw the revolver at Simon and the hairbrush at Macgregor.

Of course Macgregor had to be captured. Also Simon, his mother. It was absurd to suppose that we had covered the house from the top to the bottom with newspapers in order that these two animals might render life not worth the living. But Macgregor was not easy to catch. Leila and I had to hunt him single-handed; though, perhaps, double-handed would have been the better expression. We endeavoured to summon the servants to our assistance. But Mrs. Perkins, who was more than a little deaf when wide awake, was stone deaf when fast asleep. We never entertained any hopes of being able to make her hear. Our idea was to rouse Eliza, then to induce Eliza to prod Mrs. Perkins with her elbow in the side, and so to establish a chain of communication.

However, directly we began to rap at the bedroom door, Eliza seemed to be developing strong symptoms of hysterics, apparently under the impression that we were burglars. So, since the girl was always more or less of an idiot, and we thought it would, perhaps, not be worth our while to send her into fits, we resolved, as has been said, to hunt Macgregor single-handed.

A kitten is a lively animal. One has an object-lesson on this interesting fact in natural history, when, with the aid of a single candle, two persons endeavour to catch a kitten in a large, rambling, old-fashioned house in the darkness of the night. We almost had Macgregor several times. Never quite. We followed him all over the house with untiring and, one might almost write, increasing zeal. Up the stairs and down the stairs. Then up again, then down again. I doubt if, in his short life, Macgregor had ever enjoyed himself so much before. For my part I vowed that never again should a _lusus

naturæ_, in the shape of a white eye, keep a kitten out of a pail.

Finally, in the back kitchen, while making a frenzied dash at him, I missed Macgregor, and knocked the candle over. In endeavouring to save it I cannoned into Leila. I had not previously been aware that she was in my near neighbourhood. With such force did I strike her that I sent her flying backwards, until, reaching the floor, she found a resting-place amidst the pots and the pans. She fell with such a clatter, and with such a din, that, in the darkness, my blood ran cold. And, having fallen, she began to scream in a manner which deprived me of the little self-possession I had left.

"Is that you, Leila?" I inquired.

I felt morally persuaded that it was. I did not see who else it could be. Still, I imagined that I might as well make sure. She did not tell me in so many words. But the voice which screamed was the voice of Leila.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

Again she did not answer. She only screamed. I was in darkness. I had not saved the candle. I could not see her. I could not feel, because every time I moved I seemed to hit her with another saucepan. I had no matches. I knew of none nearer than the bedroom. I had to leave Leila screaming there. I had to find my way out of that back kitchen, stumbling, as it seemed to me, over all the contents of an ironmonger's shop, and almost knocking out my brains against the partly-opened door. I had to grope my way along the newspaper-covered passages, across the newspaper-covered hall, up the newspaper-covered stairs. I had to hang on to the newspaper-covered banisters.

If ever there was a burglar alarm I sounded it. I heard Macgregor and Simon, his mother, indulging in their little playful pranks, above and below me, and everywhere at once. But the servants did not seem to hear anything. No, nothing. I had no means of knowing if Eliza had frightened herself into a fit, and if Mrs. Perkins was dead. As I entered the bedroom I swept a jug and basin off the wash-hand-stand. It sounded as if I had broken the contents of a china shop. But no one seemed to notice it--not even Simon and Macgregor. Such was my state of agitation, and such the confusion of my mind, that I floundered into the middle cupboard of the wardrobe, which, in some mysterious manner, must have opened of its own accord. I had dragged all Leila's dresses off the hooks and half smothered myself beneath them before I discovered where I was. But I found the matches. Oh, yes, I found them after all.

I also found Leila. She was sitting up on the kitchen floor, in the midst of the pots and pans, in a frame of mind which, by me, was

unexpected. She seemed to be under the impression that my conduct had been base, not to say heartless. She appeared to be under the, to me, extraordinary delusion that I had scrambled in the darkness up the newspaper-covered stairs, and fallen over everything which I could fall over, because I hated her. She wept. It was all I myself could do to refrain from tears.

However, we managed to secure Macgregor and his mother in the drawing-room, in which apartment we felt morally persuaded that they would break everything that was worth the breaking. Then Leila insisted upon me rearranging the ingenious little trap which we had laid to catch a burglar.

"What," she remarked, as she wiped away a final tear, "was the use of doing a thing at all if we didn't do it properly?"

There was wisdom in her unanswerable inquiry, though I could not but feel thankful as I reflected that there were no more cats in the house who could mistake our intentions, and, under an entire misapprehension, turn them topsy-turvy once again.

Leila seemed to think that it was all owing to me that the newspapers had become disarranged. I do not know what could have put such an idea into her head. But it was obviously because she thought so that she insisted upon my doing all the work, while she stood three stairs above me and issued her instructions.

I am of a plethoric habit, and by the time I had done all the stooping which Leila thought was indispensable if the burglar alarm was to be all that a burglar alarm ought to be, I was, I am convinced, within a measurable distance of apoplexy. Indeed, I hinted to Leila that burglars might take up their permanent residence at The Larches before I should ever again be persuaded to make such arrangements for their reception. As for that paragraph in the paper, the stuff which some of the papers do contain is really monstrous. If I ever do encounter the editor of that particular journal in private life, I care not where nor when, I shall have to be bound over by the magistrates in at least two sureties, I know I shall.

When Leila, on entering the bedroom, stepped on the handle of the broken jug and perceived the rest of the remains, and that there was about half an inch of water on the floor, I must say that I found her behaviour not a little trying. I had not informed her of the accident which, when I was searching for the matches, I had had, because, such was my state of agitation, it had slipped my mind--though, I know, she doubts it to this hour.

I was aware that she was bound to discover what had happened, therefore why should I have attempted to conceal it? Under the

circumstances it is a mere absurdity to imagine that I could have proposed to myself to do anything of the kind; nor was it necessary for her to inform me, especially in the way in which she did inform me, that that toilet set had been one of her wedding presents. If a wedding present is to be regarded as a fetish in a family, and made a sort of little god of, then all I can say is that I wish she had had fewer wedding presents even than she did have.

I regret to have to write that Leila did not hesitate to suggest that I had broken that toilet set on purpose. According to her it was all part of my heartlessness and the hatred which I bore her. That I had almost killed myself while hunting for the matches was nothing to her. Nor did she pause to consider how I could have done it on purpose, when, such was the Egyptian nature of the darkness, I did not even know that the toilet set was there. We mopped the water up with the towels. Then Leila knelt down and pieced the fragments of the toilet set together as best she could, and continued to address me as if I had been guilty, at the very least, of treason felony. When she discovered that during my unfortunate search for those mislaid and miserable matches I had also accidentally and quite unintentionally visited the wardrobe, I thought that she would have thrown something at me, even though she would have had to use as missiles pieces of the broken ware.

It appeared that in dragging Leila's dresses off the hooks I had had what one is bound to confess was the singular ill-fortune to tear holes in most, if not in all of them. Insignificant holes they were for the most part. Really hardly worth the mentioning, though you would not have thought they were hardly worth the mentioning if you had heard Leila. True, I had made rather a lengthy incision in the back of her best silk, and ripped the waistband off her tailor-made; but the rest of the garments were scarcely, that is to say, from my point of view, not appreciably damaged. And when you consider that in my agitation I had struggled as for my life in that death-trap of a wardrobe, surely an allowance might have been made. Leila, however, made absolutely none.

That was not upon the whole a restful night. Neither Leila nor I wooed sweet sleep in that equable, at-peace-with-all-the-world frame of mind in which she should be wooed. It was some time before I ventured into bed at all. When at last I insinuated myself between the sheets Leila's observations followed me. Indeed, if I may be allowed to say so, they more than followed me. I had to coax her with all the power of coaxing that was in me before she could be induced to even think of slumber. Seating herself upon a chair, she announced her unalterable determination to spend the night there rather than consent to share her couch with the being who had torn her dresses. I perceived quite plainly that that burglar alarm was not going to prove an economical contrivance. The little mishaps which I had had were likely to prove a

more serious matter than any injury which mere burglars might have caused. But no matter. Leila protests that upon that fateful night I promised, as some slight solatium to her injured feelings, not to speak of her damaged vestments, to present her with six new dresses. This sounds to me almost incredible. I scarcely think that under any circumstances I can have gone so far as that. And when she adds, as she does add, that I gave her my solemn assurance that she should be allowed to select and to purchase at my expense any toilet set which she might see, and which might take her fancy when she next went up with me to town, I can only declare that if I did give such an undertaking it was only because I had firmly and finally resolved, in my own mind, that while such a prospect stared me in the face she never should go up with me to town again. But, as I have said already, no matter. I daresay that I did promise something. Now, I do not care what I promised. Whatever it was, the promise was extracted from me under pressure. I never meant to keep it. That I earnestly affirm.

When finally, having for all I know promised to present her with the contents of half the shops in Regent Street and of all the shops in Piccadilly, I had succeeded in persuading her to come to bed, the excitement she had undergone told upon her slight and fragile frame, and ere long my Leila was asleep. I, too, slept at her side. Nor during the remaining silent watches of the night did aught disturb our rest.

We were roused by someone knocking at our bedroom door. I awoke with the immediate consciousness that we had overslept ourselves. As a matter of fact we had, by about two hours.

"Frederic!" exclaimed Leila, in that nervous way of hers which is apt to convey to those who do not know her the impression that the last trump has sounded. "There's someone at the door!"

"Who's there?" I asked.

The voice which answered was the voice of Eliza.

"If you please, sir, there's been robbers in the house!"

"Robbers! Don't talk such nonsense!"

"If you please, sir, it ain't nonsense. Mrs. Perkins says there have!"

And what Mrs. Perkins said was true. There had been robbers in the house; or, at any rate, a robber; a midnight felon; a rifler of the homes of honest men. He had made his entry by way of the back kitchen window. He had had his supper in the front kitchen. A hearty meal it must have been. There were the remains of the feast still on the board. He seemed to have eaten all that there was worth eating. He had

drunk all that there was worth drinking. He had certainly taken away with him on his departure all that there was worth taking. He had stripped the house of all its valuables. True, they were not many; but they were our all. And they were gone.

I imagine that few burglaries have been better carried through. He was a conscientious and observant workman of his kind. The ruthless villain! I hope one day to lay hands upon him somewhere. The county constabulary, I am certain, never will.

As for the burglar alarm--the burglar alarm was arranged in a neat heap in a corner of the hall. It had not fulfilled the purpose it had been intended to fulfil. Like Macgregor and Simon, his mother, the burglar had misunderstood the intentions which had actuated our bosoms, Leila's and mine, when we had placed it there. He cannot have read the paragraph we had noticed in the paper.

I suspect that that burglar must have been, in his way--his own way--a humorist. He had seen those newspapers apparently; and, if you reflect, it was not strange: he had wondered what they meant by being there. Possibly he had supposed that they had been placed there to save the oilcloth and the carpets from being stepped upon. Anyhow, being certain that at any rate his boots were clean, and that he stepped lightly, he picked up the newspapers carefully one by one, folded them neatly into four, and placed them, as I have said, in a little heap in a corner of the hall.

THE OCCUPANT OF THE ROOM

from *Day and Night Stories*, by Algernon Blackwood

He arrived late at night by the yellow diligence, stiff and cramped after the toilsome ascent of three slow hours. The village, a single mass of shadow, was already asleep. Only in front of the little hotel was there noise and light and bustle--for a moment. The horses, with tired, slouching gait, crossed the road and disappeared into the stable of their own accord, their harness trailing in the dust; and the lumbering diligence stood for the night where they had dragged it--the body of a great yellow-sided beetle with broken legs.

In spite of his physical weariness the schoolmaster, revelling in the first hours of his ten-guinea holiday, felt exhilarated. For the high Alpine valley was marvellously still; stars twinkled over the torn ridges of the Dent du Midi where spectral snows gleamed against rocks that looked like solid ink; and the keen air smelt of pine forests, dew-soaked pastures, and freshly sawn wood. He took it all in with a kind of bewildered delight for a few minutes, while the other three passengers gave directions about their luggage and went to their rooms. Then he turned and walked over the coarse matting into the glare of the hall, only just able to resist stopping to examine the big mountain map that hung upon the wall by the door.

And, with a sudden disagreeable shock, he came down from the ideal to the actual. For at the inn--the only inn--there was no vacant room. Even the available sofas were occupied....

How stupid he had been not to write! Yet it had been impossible, he remembered, for he had come to the decision suddenly that morning in Geneva, enticed by the brilliance of the weather after a week of rain.

They talked endlessly, this gold-braided porter and the hard-faced old woman--her face was hard, he noticed--gesticulating all the time, and pointing all about the village with suggestions that he ill understood, for his French was limited and their patois was fearful.

"There!"--he might find a room, "or there!" But we are, hélas full--more full than we care about. To-morrow, perhaps--if So-and-So give up their rooms----!" And then, with much shrugging of shoulders, the hard-faced old woman stared at the gold-braided porter, and the porter stared sleepily at the schoolmaster.

At length, however, by some process of hope he did not himself understand, and following directions given by the old woman that were utterly unintelligible, he went out into the street and walked towards a dark group of houses she had pointed out to him. He only knew that he meant to thunder at a door and ask for a room. He was too weary to

think out details. The porter half made to go with him, but turned back at the last moment to speak with the old woman. The houses sketched themselves dimly in the general blackness. The air was cold. The whole valley was filled with the rush and thunder of falling water. He was thinking vaguely that the dawn could not be very far away, and that he might even spend the night wandering in the woods, when there was a sharp noise behind him and he turned to see a figure hurrying after him. It was the porter--running.

And in the little hall of the inn there began again a confused three-cornered conversation, with frequent muttered colloquy and whispered asides in patois between the woman and the porter--the net result of which was that, "If Monsieur did not object--there was a room, after all, on the first floor--only it was in a sense 'engaged.' That is to say----"

But the schoolmaster took the room without inquiring too closely into the puzzle that had somehow provided it so suddenly. The ethics of hotel-keeping had nothing to do with him. If the woman offered him quarters it was not for him to argue with her whether the said quarters were legitimately hers to offer.

But the porter, evidently a little thrilled, accompanied the guest up to the room and supplied in a mixture of French and English details omitted by the landlady--and Minturn, the schoolmaster, soon shared the thrill with him, and found himself in the atmosphere of a possible tragedy.

All who know the peculiar excitement that belongs to high mountain valleys where dangerous climbing is a chief feature of the attractions, will understand a certain faint element of high alarm that goes with the picture. One looks up at the desolate, soaring ridges and thinks involuntarily of the men who find their pleasure for days and nights together scaling perilous summits among the clouds, and conquering inch by inch the icy peaks that for ever shake their dark terror in the sky. The atmosphere of adventure, spiced with the possible horror of a very grim order of tragedy, is inseparable from any imaginative contemplation of the scene; and the idea Minturn gleaned from the half-frightened porter lost nothing by his ignorance of the language. This Englishwoman, the real occupant of the room, had insisted on going without a guide. She had left just before daybreak two days before--the porter had seen her start--and ... she had not returned! The route was difficult and dangerous, yet not impossible for a skilled climber, even a solitary one. And the Englishwoman was an experienced mountaineer. Also, she was self-willed, careless of advice, bored by warnings, self-confident to a degree. Queer, moreover; for she kept entirely to herself, and sometimes remained in her room with locked doors, admitting no one, for days together: a "crank," evidently, of the first water.

This much Minturn gathered clearly enough from the porter's talk while his luggage was brought in and the room set to rights; further, too, that the search party had gone out and _might_, of course, return at any moment. In which case---- Thus the room was empty, yet still hers. "If Monsieur did not object--if the risk he ran of having to turn out suddenly in the night----" It was the loquacious porter who furnished the details that made the transaction questionable; and Minturn dismissed the loquacious porter as soon as possible, and prepared to get into the hastily arranged bed and snatch all the hours of sleep he could before he was turned out.

At first, it must be admitted, he felt uncomfortable--distinctly uncomfortable. He was in some one else's room. He had really no right to be there. It was in the nature of an unwarrantable intrusion; and while he unpacked he kept looking over his shoulder as though some one were watching him from the corners. Any moment, it seemed, he would hear a step in the passage, a knock would come at the door, the door would open, and there he would see this vigorous Englishwoman looking him up and down with anger. Worse still--he would hear her voice asking him what he was doing in her room--her bedroom. Of course, he had an adequate explanation, but still----!

Then, reflecting that he was already half undressed, the humour of it flashed for a second across his mind, and he laughed--_quietly_. And at once, after that laughter, under his breath, came the sudden sense of tragedy he had felt before. Perhaps, even while he smiled, her body lay broken and cold upon those awful heights, the wind of snow playing over her hair, her glazed eyes staring sightless up to the stars.... It made him shudder. The sense of this woman whom he had never seen, whose name even he did not know, became extraordinarily real. Almost he could imagine that she was somewhere in the room with him, hidden, observing all he did.

He opened the door softly to put his boots outside, and when he closed it again he turned the key. Then he finished unpacking and distributed his few things about the room. It was soon done; for, in the first place, he had only a small Gladstone and a knapsack, and secondly, the only place where he could spread his clothes was the sofa. There was no chest of drawers, and the cupboard, an unusually large and solid one, was locked. The Englishwoman's things had evidently been hastily put away in it. The only sign of her recent presence was a bunch of faded _Alpenrosen_ standing in a glass jar upon the washhand stand. This, and a certain faint perfume, were all that remained. In spite, however, of these very slight evidences, the whole room was pervaded with a curious sense of occupancy that he found exceedingly distasteful. One moment the atmosphere seemed subtly charged with a "just left" feeling; the next it was a queer awareness of "still here" that made him turn cold and look hurriedly behind him.

Altogether, the room inspired him with a singular aversion, and the strength of this aversion seemed the only excuse for his tossing the faded flowers out of the window, and then hanging his mackintosh upon the cupboard door in such a way as to screen it as much as possible from view. For the sight of that big, ugly cupboard, filled with the clothing of a woman who might then be beyond any further need of covering--thus his imagination insisted on picturing it--touched in him a startled sense of the Incongruous that did not stop there, but crept through his mind gradually till it merged somehow into a sense of a rather grotesque horror. At any rate, the sight of that cupboard was offensive, and he covered it almost instinctively. Then, turning out the electric light, he got into bed.

But the instant the room was dark he realised that it was more than he could stand; for, with the blackness, there came a sudden rush of cold that he found it hard to explain. And the odd thing was that, when he lit the candle beside his bed, he noticed that his hand trembled.

This, of course, was too much. His imagination was taking liberties and must be called to heel. Yet the way he called it to order was significant, and its very deliberateness betrayed a mind that has already admitted fear. And fear, once in, is difficult to dislodge. He lay there upon his elbow in bed and carefully took note of all the objects in the room--with the intention, as it were, of taking an inventory of everything his senses perceived, then drawing a line, adding them up finally, and saying with decision, "That's all the room contains! I've counted every single thing. There is nothing more. _Now_ --I may sleep in peace!"

And it was during this absurd process of enumerating the furniture of the room that the dreadful sense of distressing lassitude came over him that made it difficult even to finish counting. It came swiftly, yet with an amazing kind of violence that overwhelmed him softly and easily with a sensation of enervating weariness hard to describe. And its first effect was to banish fear. He no longer possessed enough energy to feel really afraid or nervous. The cold remained, but the alarm vanished. And into every corner of his usually vigorous personality crept the insidious poison of a _muscular_ fatigue--at first--that in a few seconds, it seemed, translated itself into _spiritual_ inertia. A sudden consciousness of the foolishness, the crass futility, of life, of effort, of fighting--of all that makes life worth living, shot into every fibre of his being, and left him utterly weak. A spirit of black pessimism that was not even vigorous enough to assert itself, invaded the secret chambers of his heart....

Every picture that presented itself to his mind came dressed in grey shadows: those bored and sweating horses toiling up the ascent to--nothing! that hard-faced landlady taking so much trouble to let her

desire for gain conquer her sense of morality--for a few francs! That gold-braided porter, so talkative, fussy, energetic, and so anxious to tell all he knew! What was the use of them all? And for himself, what in the world was the good of all the labour and drudgery he went through in that preparatory school where he was junior master? What could it lead to? Wherein lay the value of so much uncertain toil, when the ultimate secrets of life were hidden and no one knew the final goal? How foolish was effort, discipline, work! How vain was pleasure! How trivial the noblest life!...

With a fearful jump that nearly upset the candle Minturn pulled himself together. Such vicious thoughts were usually so remote from his normal character that the sudden vile invasion produced a swift reaction. Yet, only for a moment. Instantly, again, the black depression descended upon him like a wave. His work--it could lead to nothing but the dreary labour of a small headmastership after all--seemed as vain and foolish as his holiday in the Alps. What an idiot he had been, to be sure, to come out with a knapsack merely to work himself into a state of exhaustion climbing over toilsome mountains that led to nowhere--resulted in nothing. A dreariness of the grave possessed him. Life was a ghastly fraud! Religion childish humbug! Everything was merely a trap--a trap of death; a coloured toy that Nature used as a decoy! But a decoy for what? For nothing! There was no meaning in anything. The only real thing was--DEATH. And the happiest people were those who found it soonest.

Then why wait for it to come?

He sprang out of bed, thoroughly frightened. This was horrible. Surely mere physical fatigue could not produce a world so black, an outlook so dismal, a cowardice that struck with such sudden hopelessness at the very roots of life? For, normally, he was cheerful and strong, full of the tides of healthy living; and this appalling lassitude swept the very basis of his personality into Nothingness and the desire for death. It was like the development of a Secondary Personality. He had read, of course, how certain persons who suffered shocks developed thereafter entirely different characteristics, memory, tastes, and so forth. It had all rather frightened him. Though scientific men vouched for it, it was hardly to be believed. Yet here was a similar thing taking place in his own consciousness. He was, beyond question, experiencing all the mental variations of--some one else! It was un-moral. It was awful. It was--well, after all, at the same time, it was uncommonly interesting.

And this interest he began to feel was the first sign of his returning normal Self. For to feel interest is to live, and to love life.

He sprang into the middle of the room--then switched on the electric light. And the first thing that struck his eye was--the big cupboard.

"Hallo! There's that--beastly cupboard!" he exclaimed to himself, involuntarily, yet aloud. It held all the clothes, the swinging skirts and coats and summer blouses of the dead woman. For he knew now--somehow or other--that she was dead....

At that moment, through the open windows, rushed the sound of falling water, bringing with it a vivid realisation of the desolate, snow-swept heights. He saw her--positively saw her!--lying where she had fallen, the frost upon her cheeks, the snow-dust eddying about her hair and eyes, her broken limbs pushing against the lumps of ice. For a moment the sense of spiritual lassitude--of the emptiness of life--vanished before this picture of broken effort--of a small human force battling pluckily, yet in vain, against the impersonal and pitiless Potencies of Inanimate Nature--and he found himself again, his normal self. Then, instantly, returned again that terrible sense of cold, nothingness, emptiness....

And he found himself standing opposite the big cupboard where her clothes were. He wanted to see those clothes--things she had used and worn. Quite close he stood, almost touching it. The next second he had touched it. His knuckles struck upon the wood.

Why he knocked is hard to say. It was an instinctive movement probably. Something in his deepest self dictated it--ordered it. He knocked at the door. And the dull sound upon the wood into the stillness of that room brought--horror. Why it should have done so he found it as hard to explain to himself as why he should have felt impelled to knock. The fact remains that when he heard the faint reverberation inside the cupboard, it brought with it so vivid a realisation of the woman's presence that he stood there shivering upon the floor with a dreadful sense of anticipation: he almost expected to hear an answering knock from within--the rustling of the hanging skirts perhaps--or, worse still, to see the locked door slowly open towards him.

And from that moment, he declares that in some way or other he must have partially lost control of himself, or at least of his better judgment; for he became possessed by such an overmastering desire to tear open that cupboard door and see the clothes within, that he tried every key in the room in the vain effort to unlock it, and then, finally, before he quite realised what he was doing--rang the bell!

But, having rung the bell for no obvious or intelligent reason at two o'clock in the morning, he then stood waiting in the middle of the floor for the servant to come, conscious for the first time that something outside his ordinary self had pushed him towards the act. It was almost like an internal voice that directed him ... and thus, when at last steps came down the passage and he faced the cross and sleepy chambermaid, amazed at being summoned at such an hour, he found no

difficulty in the matter of what he should say. For the same power that insisted he should open the cupboard door also impelled him to utter words over which he apparently had no control.

"It's not you I rang for!" he said with decision and impatience, "I want a man. Wake the porter and send him up to me at once--hurry! I tell you, hurry----!"

And when the girl had gone, frightened at his earnestness, Minturn realised that the words surprised himself as much as they surprised her. Until they were out of his mouth he had not known what exactly he was saying. But now he understood that some force foreign to his own personality was using his mind and organs. The black depression that had possessed him a few moments before was also part of it. The powerful mood of this vanished woman had somehow momentarily taken possession of him--communicated, possibly, by the atmosphere of things in the room still belonging to her. But even now, when the porter, without coat or collar, stood beside him in the room, he did not understand why he insisted, with a positive fury admitting no denial, that the key of that cupboard must be found and the door instantly opened.

The scene was a curious one. After some perplexed whispering with the chambermaid at the end of the passage, the porter managed to find and produce the key in question. Neither he nor the girl knew clearly what this excited Englishman was up to, or why he was so passionately intent upon opening the cupboard at two o'clock in the morning. They watched him with an air of wondering what was going to happen next. But something of his curious earnestness, even of his late fear, communicated itself to them, and the sound of the key grating in the lock made them both jump.

They held their breath as the creaking door swung slowly open. All heard the clatter of that other key as it fell against the wooden floor--within. The cupboard had been locked from the inside. But it was the scared housemaid, from her position in the corridor, who first saw--and with a wild scream fell crashing against the bannisters.

The porter made no attempt to save her. The schoolmaster and himself made a simultaneous rush towards the door, now wide open. They, too, had seen.

There were no clothes, skirts or blouses on the pegs, but, all by itself, from an iron hook in the centre, they saw the body of the Englishwoman hanging by the neck, the head bent horribly forwards, the tongue protruding. Jarred by the movement of unlocking, the body swung slowly round to face them.... Pinned upon the inside of the door was a hotel envelope with the following words pencilled in straggling writing:

"Tired--unhappy--hopelessly depressed.... I cannot face life any longer.... All is black. I must put an end to it.... I meant to do it on the mountains, but was afraid. I slipped back to my room unobserved. This way is easiest and best...."

THE PLAY HOUSE

from *Country Neighbors*, by Alice Brown

Amelia Maxwell sat by the front-chamber window of the great house overlooking the road, and her own "story-an'-a-half" farther toward the west. Every day she was alone under her own roof, save at the times when old lady Knowles of the great house summoned her for work at fine sewing or braiding rags. All Amelia's kin were dead. Now she was used to their solemn absence, and sufficiently at one with her own humble way of life, letting her few acres at the halves, and earning a dollar here and there with her clever fingers. She was but little over forty, yet she was aware that her life, in its keener phases, was already done. She had had her romance and striven to forget it; but out of that time pathetic voices now and then called to her, and old longings awoke, to breathe for a moment and then sleep again.

Amelia seemed, even to old lady Knowles, who knew her best, a cheerful, humorous body; but only Amelia saw the road by which her serenity had come. Chiefly it was through an inexplicable devotion to the great house. She could not remember a time when it was not wonderful to her. While she was a little girl, living alone with her mother, she used to sit on the doorstep with her bread and milk at bedtime, and think of the great house, how grand it was and large. There was a wonderful way the sun had of falling, at twilight, across the pillars of its porch where the elm drooped sweetly, and in the moonlight it was like a fairy city. But the morning was perhaps the best moment of all. The great house was painted a pale yellow, and when Amelia awoke with the sun in her little unshaded chamber, she thought how dark the blinds were there, with such a solemn richness in their green. The flower-beds in front were beautiful to her; but the back garden, lying alongside the orchard, and stretching through tangles of sweet-william and rose, was an enchanted spot to play in. The child that was, used to wander there and feel very rich. Now, a woman, she sat in the great house sewing, and felt rich again. As it happened, for one of the many times it came to her, she was thinking what the great house had done for her. Old lady Knowles had, in her stately way, been a kind of patron saint, and in that summer, years ago, when Amelia's romance died and she had drooped like a starving plant, Rufus, the old lady's son, had seemed to see her trouble and stood by her. He did not speak of it. He only took her for long drives, and made his cheerful presence evident in many ways, and when he died, with a tragic suddenness, Amelia used selfishly to feel that he had lived at least long enough to keep her from failing of that inner blight.

On this day when old lady Knowles had gone with Ann, her faithful help, to see the cousin to whom she made pilgrimage once a year, Amelia resolved to enjoy herself to the full. She laid down her sewing, from time to time, to look about her at the poppy-strewn paper, the four-post

bed and flowered tester, the great fireplace with its shining dogs, and the Venus and Cupid mirror. Over and over again she had played that the house was hers, and to-day, through some heralding excitement in the air, it seemed doubly so. She sat in a dream of housewifely possession, conning idly over the pleasant things she might do before the day was over. There was cold tongue for her dinner, Ann had told her, and a clear soup, if she liked to heat it. She might cook vegetables if she chose. And there was the best of tea to be made out of the china caddy, and rich cake in the parlor crock. After one such glad deliberation, she caught her sewing guiltily up from her lap and began to set compensating stitches. But even then her conscience slept unstirred. Old lady Knowles was in no hurry for the work, she knew, and she would make up for her dreaming in the account of her day.

There was a sound without. The gate swung softly shut and a man came up the path. Amelia, at the glance, rose quickly, dropped her sewing, and hurried out and down the stairs. The front door was open, she knew, and though there was never anything to be afraid of, still the house was in her charge. At the door she met him, just lifting his hand to touch the knocker. He was a tall, weedy fellow of something more than her own age, with light hair and blue eyes and a strangely arrested look, as if he obstinately, and against his own advantage, continued to keep young.

Amelia knew him at once, as he did her, though it was twenty years since they had met.

"Why, Jared Beale!" she faltered.

He was much moved. The flush came quickly to his face in a way she had known, and his eyes softened.

"I should ha' recognized ye anywheres, Milly," he asserted.

She still stood looking at him, unable to ask him in or to make apology for the lack.

"I went straight to your house from the train," he said. "'Twas all shut up. Don't anybody live there now?"

"Yes," answered Amelia, "somebody lives there." The red had come into her cheeks, and her eyes burned brightly. Then as he looked at her hesitatingly, in the way he used to look, she trembled a little.

"Come in, Jared," she said, retreating a hospitable space. "Come right in."

She stood aside, and then, when he stepped over the sill, led the way into the dining-room, where there was a cool green light from the darkened blinds, and the only window open to the sun disclosed a

trembling grapevine and a vista down the garden path. Amelia drew forward a chair, with a decided motion.

"Sit down," she said, and busied herself with opening a blind.

When she took her own chair opposite him, she found that he had laid his hat beside him on the floor, and, with the tips of his fingers together, was bending forward in an attitude belonging to his youth. He was regarding her with the slightly blurred look of his near-sighted eyes, and she began hastily to speak.

"You stayin' round these parts?"

"No," said Jared, "no. I had to come east on business. There was some property to be settled up in Beulah, so I thought I'd jest step down here an' see how things were."

"Beulah!" she repeated. "Why, that's fifty miles from here!"

"Yes," returned Jared. "It's a matter o' fifty mile. Fact is," he said uneasily, "I didn't know how you was fixed. It's kinder worried me."

A flush ran into her face, to the roots of her pretty hair; yet her frank eyes never left him. Then her evasive speech belied her look.

"I get along real well. I s'pose you knew mother wa'n't with me now?"

"I ain't heard a word from here for seventeen year," he said, half bitterly, as if the silence had been hard to bear. "There's no way for me to hear now. The last was from Tom Merrick. He said you'd begun to go with Rufus Knowles."

Amelia trembled over her whole body.

"That was a good while ago," she ventured.

"Yes, 'twas. A good many things have come an' gone. An' now Rufus is dead--I see his death in an old paper--an' here you be, his widder, livin' in the old house."

"Why!" breathed Amelia, "why!" She choked upon the word, but before she could deny it he had begun again, in gentle reminiscence.

"'Twon't harm nobody to talk over old times a mite, Amelia. Mebbe that's what I come on for, though I thought 'twas to see how you was fixed. I thought mebbe I should find you livin' kinder near the wind, an' mebbe you'd let me look out for you a mite."

The tears came into Amelia's eyes. She looked about her as if she owned

the room, the old china, and the house.

"That's real good of you, Jared," she said movingly. "I sha'n't ever forget it. But you see for yourself. I don't want for nothin'."

"I guess we should ha' thought 'twas queer, when you went trottin' by to school," he said irrelevantly, "if anybody'd told you you'd reign over the old Knowles house."

"Yes," said Amelia softly, again looking about her, this time with love and thankfulness, "I guess they would. You leave your wife well?" she asked suddenly, perhaps to suggest the reality of his own house of life.

Jared shook his head.

"She ain't stepped a step for seven year."

"Oh, my!" grieved Amelia. "Won't she ever be any better?"

"No. We've had all the doctors, eclectic an' herb besides, an' they don't give her no hope. She was a great driver. We laid up money steady them years before she was took down. She knew how to make an' she knew how to save."

His face settled into lines of brooding recollection. Immediately Amelia was aware that those years had been bitter to him, and that the fruit of them was stale and dry. She cut by instinct into a pleasant by-path.

"You play your fiddle any now?"

He started out of his maze at life.

"No," he owned, "no!" as if he hardly remembered such a thing had been. "I dropped that more'n fifteen year ago."

"Seems if my feet never could keep still when you played 'Money Musk,'" avowed Amelia, her eyes shining. "'The Road to Boston,' too! My! wa'n't that grand!"

"'Twas mostly dance-music I knew," said Jared. "She never liked it," he added, in a burst of weary confidence.

"Your wife?"

"She was a church member, old-fashioned kind. Didn't believe in dancin'. 'The devil's tunes,' she called 'em. Well, mebbe they were; but I kinder liked 'em myself."

"Well," said Amelia, in a safe commonplace, "I guess there's some harm

in 'most everything. It's 'cordin' to the way you take it." Then one of her quick changes came upon her. The self that played at life when real life failed her, and so kept youth alive, awoke to shine in her eyes and flush her pretty cheek. She looked about the room, as if to seek concurrence from the hearthside gods. "Jared," she said, "you goin' to stay round here long?"

He made an involuntary motion toward his hat.

"No, oh, no," he answered. "I'm goin' 'cross lots to the Junction. I come round the road. I guess 'tain't more'n four mile along by the pine woods an' the b'ilin' spring," he added, smiling at her. "Leastways it didn't use to be. I thought if I could get the seven-o'clock, 'twould take me back to Boston so 's I could ketch my train to-night. She's kinder dull, out there alone," he ended, wearily. "'Twas some o' her property I come to settle up. She'll want to hear about it. I never was no kind of a letter-writer."

Amelia rose.

"I'll tell you what, then," she said, with a sweet decision, "you stay right here an' have dinner. I'm all alone to-day."

"Ain't old lady Knowles--" He paused decorously, and Amelia laughed. It seemed to her as if old lady Knowles and the house would always be beneficently there because they always had been.

"Law, yes," she said. "She's alive. So's old Ann. They've gone to Wareham, to spend the day."

Jared threw back his head and laughed.

"If that don't make time stand still," he said, "nothin' ever did. Why, when we was in the Third Reader old lady Knowles an' Ann harnessed up one day in the year an' drove over to Wareham to spend the day."

"Yes," Amelia sparkled back at him, "'tis so. They look pretty much the same, both of 'em."

"They must be well along in years?"

Amelia had begun putting up the leaves of the mahogany dining-table. She laughed, a pretty ripple.

"Well, anyway," she qualified, "old Pomp ain't gone with 'em. He's buried out under the August sweet. They've got an old white now. 'Twas the colt long after you left here." She had gone to the dresser and pulled open a drawer. Those were the every-day tablecloths, fine and good; but in the drawer above, she knew, was the best damask, snowdrops

and other patterns more wonderful, with birds and butterflies. She debated but a moment, and then pulled out a lovely piece that shone with ironing. "I'll tell you what it is, Jared," she said, returning to spread it on the table with deft touches, "it's we that change, as well as other folks. Ever think o' that? Ever occur to you old lady Knowles wa'n't much over sixty them days when we used to call her old? 'Twas because we were so young ourselves. She don't seem much different to me now from what she did then."

"There's a good deal in that," said Jared, rising. "Want I should draw you up some water out o' the old well?"

"Yes. I shall want some in a minute. I'll make us a cup o' coffee. You like that."

Jared drew the water, and after he had brought it to her he went out into the back garden; and, while she moved back and forth from pantry to table, she caught glimpses of him through the window as he went about from the bees to the flower-beds, in a reminiscent wandering. Once he halted under the sweet-bough and gave one branch a shake, and then, with an unerring remembrance, he crossed the sward to the "sopsy-vine" by the wall.

Amelia could not get over the wonder of having him there. Strangely, he had not changed. Even his speech had the old neighborly tang. Whether he had returned to it as to a never-forgotten tune, she could not know; but it was in her ears, awakening touches of old harmony. Yet these things she dared not dwell upon. She put them aside in haste to live with after he should be gone.

Her preparations were swiftly made, lest she should lose a moment of his stay, and presently she went to the door and summoned him.

"Dinner's ready, Jared!"

It sounded as if she had said it every day, and she knew why; the words and others like them, sweet and commonplace, were inwoven with the texture of her dreams.

Jared came in, an eager look upon his face, as if he also were in a maze, and they sat down at the table, where the viands were arranged in a beautiful order. Jared laid down his knife and fork.

"Well," said he, "old Ann ain't lost her faculty. This tastes for all the world just as old lady Knowles's things used to when I come over here to weed the garden an' stayed to dinner."

Amelia lifted a thankful look.

"I'm proper glad you've come back, Jared," she said simply. "I never had any expectation of seein' you again, leastways not in this world."

Jared spoke irrelevantly:--

"There's a good many things I've wanted to talk over with you, 'Melia, from time to time. Now there's Arthur."

Amelia nodded.

"He ain't done very well, has he?" she inquired. "I never knew much about him after he moved away; but seems if I heard he'd took to drink."

"That's it. Arthur was as good a boy as ever stepped, but he got led away when he wa'n't old enough to know t'other from which. Well, I've always stood by him, 'Melia. Folks say he's only an adopted brother. 'What you want to hang on to him for, an' send good money after bad?' That's what they say. Well, what if he is an adopted brother? Father an' mother set by him, an' I set by him, too."

He had a worried look, and his tone rang fretfully, as if it continued a line of dreary argument.

"Of course you set by him, Jared," said Amelia, almost indignantly. "I shouldn't feel the same towards you if you didn't."

Jared was deep in the relief of his pathetic confidences.

"Arthur married young, an' folks said he'd no business to, nothin' to live on, an' his habits bein' what they were. Well, I couldn't dispute that. But when he got that fall, so 't he laid there paralyzed, I wanted to take the cars an' go right on to York State an' see him. I didn't. I couldn't get away; but I sent him all I could afford to, an' I'm goin' to keep on sendin' jest as long as I'm above ground. An' I've made my will an' provided for him."

His voice had a fractious tone, as if he combated an unseen tyrant. Amelia dared not speak. At a word, she felt, he might say too much. Now Jared was looking at her in a bright appeal, as if, sure as he was of her sympathy, he besought the expression of it.

"There ain't a soul but you knows I've made my will, 'Melia," he said. "There's suthin' in it for you, too."

Amelia shrank, and her eyes betrayed her terror; it was as if she could carry on their relation together quite happily, but as soon as the judgment of the world were challenged she must hide it away, like a treasure in a box.

"No, Jared!" she breathed. "No, oh, no! Don't you do such a thing as that."

Jared laughed a little, but half sadly.

"Seems kinder queer to me now," he owned, "now I see you settin' here, only to put out your hand an' take a thing if you want it. Did Rufus leave a will?"

Amelia shrank still smaller.

"No," she trembled; "no, he didn't leave a will."

"Well, I sha'n't change mine, 'Melia." He spoke with an ostentatious lightness, but Amelia was aware that his mind labored in heavy seas of old regret, buoyed by the futile hope of compensating her age for the joys her youth had lacked. "I guess I'll let it stand as 'tis, an', long as you don't need what I've left ye, why, you can put it into some kind o' folderol an' enjoy it. You was always one to enjoy things."

They sat a long time at the table, and Jared took, as he said, more coffee than was good for him, and praised the making of it. Then he followed her about as she cleared away, and helped her a little with an awkward hand. Amelia left the dishes in the sink.

"I won't clear up till night," she said. "We ain't talked out yet."

She led the way into the garden, and under the grape-trellis, where the tall lilac-hedge shut them from the sight of passers-by, she gave him old lady Knowles's great armchair, and took the little one that was hers when she came over to sit a while with her old friend. The talk went wandering back as if it sought the very sources of youth and life; but somehow it touched commonplaces only. Yet Amelia had the sense, and she was sure he had, too, of wandering there hand in hand, of finding no surprises, but only the old things grown more dear, the old loyalties the more abiding.

Suddenly he spoke, haltingly, voicing her own conviction.

"Don't seem but a minute, 'Melia, sence we set talkin' things over, much as we do now. Seems if we hadn't been so fur separated all these years."

"No," said Amelia, with her beautiful sincerity, "I don't believe we have been, Jared. Maybe that's how it is when folks die. We can't see 'em nor speak to 'em, but maybe they go right along bein' what we like best. I know 'tis so with mother. Seems if, if she walked in here this minute, we shouldn't have so very many stitches to take up. Sometimes I've thought all I should say would be, 'Well, mother, you've got back, ain't you?' Kinder like that."

The beautiful afternoon light lay on the grass and turned the grapevine to a tender green. Jared looked upon the land as if he were treasuring it in his heart for a day of loss. When the sun was low, and green and red were flaming in the west, he rose.

"Well, 'Melia," he said, "I've seen you. Now I'll go."

Amelia stirred, too, recalled to service.

"I want to make you a cup o' tea," she said. "You get me a pail o' fresh water, Jared. 'Twon't take but a minute."

He followed her about, this time, while she set the table; and again they broke bread together. When he rose from his chair now, it was for good.

"Well, 'Melia," he said; and she gave him her hand.

She went with him to the door, and stood there as he started down the path. Half-way he hesitated, and then came back to her. His eyes were soft and kindly.

"'Melia," he said, "I ain't told you the half, an' I dunno 's I can tell it now. I never knew how things were with you. I've laid awake nights, wonderin'. You never was very strong. 'Why,' says I to myself many a night when I'd hear the wind blowin' ag'inst the winder, 'mebbe she's had to go out to work. Mebbe she ain't got a place to lay her head.'"

He was rushing on in a full tide of confidence, and she recalled him. She leaned forward to him, out of the doorway of her beautiful house, and spoke in an assuring tone.

"Don't you worry no more, Jared. I'm safe an' well content, an' you ain't got nothin' to regret. An' when we meet again,--I guess 'twon't be here, dear, it'll be t'other side,--why, we'll sit down an' have another dish o' talk."

Then they shook hands again, and Jared walked away. When he looked back from the top of Schoolma'am Hill, she was still in the doorway, and she waved her hand to him.

After that last glimpse of him, Amelia went soberly about the house, setting it in order. When her dishes were washed and she had fed old Trot, the cat, forgotten all day, she rolled up the fine tablecloth and left it behind the porch-door, where she could take it on her way home. Then she sat down on the front steps and waited for old lady Knowles. Amelia did not think very much about her day. It was still a possession to be laid aside and pondered over all the hours and days until she

died. For there would be no other day like it.

The dusk fell and the sounds of night began to rise in their poignant summoning of memory and hope. The past and the present seemed one to her in a beautiful dream; yet it was not so much a dream as life itself, a warm reality. Presently there came the slow thud of horse's feet, and the chaise turned in at the yard. Old lady Knowles was in it, sitting prettily erect, as she had driven away, and Ann was peering forward, as she always did, to see if the house had burned down in their absence. John Trueman, who lived "down the road," was lounging along behind. They had called him as they passed, and bade him come to "tend the horse." Amelia rose and shook herself free from the web of her dream. She hurried forward and at the horse-block offered old lady Knowles her hand.

"Anything happened?" asked old Ann, making her way past to the kitchen.

Amelia only smiled at her, but she followed old lady Knowles in at the porch-door.

"We've had a very enjoyable day, Amelia," said the old lady, untying her bonnet-strings. "Suppose you lay this on the table. Ann must brush it before it's put away. What is it? Child, child, what is it?"

Amelia had taken a fold of her old friend's skirt. It would have seemed to her a liberty to touch her hand.

"Mis' Knowles," she said, "I've had company. 'Twas somebody to see me, an' I got dinner here, an' supper, too, an' I used your best tablecloth, an' I'm goin' to do it up so 't Ann won't know. An' I acted for all the world as if 'twas my own house."

Old lady Knowles laughed a little. She had never been a woman to whom small things seemed large, and now very few things were of any size at all.

"Who was it, Amelia?" she asked. "Who was your company?"

There was a moment's silence, and Amelia heard her own heart beat. But she answered quietly,--

""'Twas Jared Beale."

There was silence again while old lady Knowles thought back over the years. When she spoke, her voice was very soft and kindly.

"You are a good girl, Amelia. You've always been a good girl. Run home, child, now, and come to-morrow. Good-night."

Amelia, out in the path a moment afterwards, the tablecloth under her arm, could hardly believe in what had surely happened to her. Old lady Knowles had bent forward to her; her soft lips had touched Amelia's cheek.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE BED

by Guy de Maupassant, from *Library of the World's Best Mystery and Detective Stories*, by Edited by Julian Hawthorne

One autumn I went to stay for the hunting season with some friends in a chateau in Picardy.

My friends were fond of practical joking, as all my friends are. I do not care to know any other sort of people.

When I arrived, they gave me a princely reception, which at once aroused distrust in my breast. We had some capital shooting. They embraced me, they cajoled me, as if they expected to have great fun at my expense.

I said to myself:

"Look out, old ferret! They have something in preparation for you."

During the dinner, the mirth was excessive, far too great, in fact. I thought: "Here are people who take a double share of amusement, and apparently without reason. They must be looking out in their own minds for some good bit of fun. Assuredly I am to be the victim of the joke. Attention!"

During the entire evening, everyone laughed in an exaggerated fashion. I smelled a practical joke in the air, as a dog smells game. But what was it? I was watchful, restless. I did not let a word or a meaning or a gesture escape me. Everyone seemed to me an object of suspicion, and I even looked distrustfully at the faces of the servants.

The hour rang for going to bed, and the whole household came to escort me to my room. Why? They called to me: "Good night." I entered the apartment, shut the door, and remained standing, without moving a single step, holding the wax candle in my hand.

I heard laughter and whispering in the corridor. Without doubt they were spying on me. I cast a glance around the walls, the furniture, the ceiling, the hangings, the floor. I saw nothing to justify suspicion. I heard persons moving about outside my door. I had no doubt they were looking through the keyhole.

An idea came into my head: "My candle may suddenly go out, and leave me in darkness."

Then I went across to the mantelpiece, and lighted all the wax candles that were on it. After that, I cast another glance around me without

discovering anything. I advanced with short steps, carefully examining the apartment. Nothing. I inspected every article one after the other. Still nothing. I went over to the window. The shutters, large wooden shutters, were open. I shut them with great care, and then drew the curtains, enormous velvet curtains, and I placed a chair in front of them, so as to have nothing to fear from without.

Then I cautiously sat down. The armchair was solid. I did not venture to get into the bed. However, time was flying; and I ended by coming to the conclusion that I was ridiculous. If they were spying on me, as I supposed, they must, while waiting for the success of the joke they had been preparing for me, have been laughing enormously at my terror. So I made up my mind to go to bed. But the bed was particularly suspicious-looking. I pulled at the curtains. They seemed to be secure. All the same, there was danger. I was going perhaps to receive a cold shower-bath from overhead, or perhaps, the moment I stretched myself out, to find myself sinking under the floor with my mattress. I searched in my memory for all the practical jokes of which I ever had experience. And I did not want to be caught. Ah! certainly not! certainly not! Then I suddenly bethought myself of a precaution which I consider one of extreme efficacy: I caught hold of the side of the mattress gingerly, and very slowly drew it toward me. It came away, followed by the sheet and the rest of the bedclothes. I dragged all these objects into the very middle of the room, facing the entrance door. I made my bed over again as best I could at some distance from the suspected bedstead and the corner which had filled me with such anxiety. Then, I extinguished all the candles, and, groping my way, I slipped under the bedclothes.

For at least another hour, I remained awake, starting at the slightest sound. Everything seemed quiet in the chateau. I fell asleep.

I must have been in a deep sleep for a long time, but all of a sudden, I was awakened with a start by the fall of a heavy body tumbling right on top of my own body, and, at the same time, I received on my face, on my neck, and on my chest a burning liquid which made me utter a howl of pain. And a dreadful noise, as if a sideboard laden with plates and dishes had fallen down, penetrated my ears.

I felt myself suffocating under the weight that was crushing me and preventing me from moving. I stretched out my hand to find out what was the nature of this object. I felt a face, a nose, and whiskers. Then with all my strength I launched out a blow over this face. But I immediately received a hail of cuffings which made me jump straight out of the soaked sheets, and rush in my nightshirt into the corridor, the door of which I found open.

O stupor! it was broad daylight. The noise brought my friends hurrying into the apartment, and we found, sprawling over my improvised bed, the

dismayed valet, who, while bringing me my morning cup of tea, had tripped over this obstacle in the middle of the floor, and fallen on his stomach, spilling, in spite of himself, my breakfast over my face.

The precautions I had taken in closing the shutters and going to sleep in the middle of the room had only brought about the interlude I had been striving to avoid.

Ah! how they all laughed that day!

THE FURNISHED ROOM

from *The Four Million*, by O. Henry

Restless, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower West Side. Homeless, they have a hundred homes. They flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever—transients in abode, transients in heart and mind. They sing "Home, Sweet Home" in ragtime; they carry their lares et penates in a bandbox; their vine is entwined about a picture hat; a rubber plant is their fig tree.

Hence the houses of this district, having had a thousand dwellers, should have a thousand tales to tell, mostly dull ones, no doubt; but it would be strange if there could not be found a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests.

One evening after dark a young man prowled among these crumbling red mansions, ringing their bells. At the twelfth he rested his lean hand-baggage upon the step and wiped the dust from his hatband and forehead. The bell sounded faint and far away in some remote, hollow depths.

To the door of this, the twelfth house whose bell he had rung, came a housekeeper who made him think of an unwholesome, surfeited worm that had eaten its nut to a hollow shell and now sought to fill the vacancy with edible lodgers.

He asked if there was a room to let.

"Come in," said the housekeeper. Her voice came from her throat; her throat seemed lined with fur. "I have the third floor back, vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it?"

The young man followed her up the stairs. A faint light from no particular source mitigated the shadows of the halls. They trod noiselessly upon a stair carpet that its own loom would have forsworn. It seemed to have become vegetable; to have degenerated in that rank, sunless air to lush lichen or spreading moss that grew in patches to the staircase and was viscid under the foot like organic matter. At each turn of the stairs were vacant niches in the wall. Perhaps plants had once been set within them. If so they had died in that foul and tainted air. It may be that statues of the saints had stood there, but it was not difficult to conceive that imps and devils had dragged them forth in the darkness and down to the unholy depths of some furnished pit below.

"This is the room," said the housekeeper, from her furry throat. "It's a nice room. It ain't often vacant. I had some most elegant people in it last summer—no trouble at all, and paid in advance to the minute. The water's at the end of the hall. Sprowls and Mooney kept it three months. They done a vaudeville sketch. Miss B'retta Sprowls—you may have heard of her—Oh, that was just the stage names—right there over the dresser is where the marriage certificate hung, framed. The gas is here, and you see there is plenty of closet room. It's a room everybody likes. It never stays idle long."

"Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?" asked the young man.

"They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theatres. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes."

He engaged the room, paying for a week in advance. He was tired, he said, and would take possession at once. He counted out the money. The room had been made ready, she said, even to towels and water. As the housekeeper moved away he put, for the thousandth time, the question that he carried at the end of his tongue.

"A young girl—Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height and slender, with reddish, gold hair and a dark mole near her left eyebrow."

"No, I don't remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don't call that one to mind."

No. Always no. Five months of ceaseless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning managers, agents, schools and choruses; by night among the audiences of theatres from all-star casts down to music halls so low that he dreaded to find what he most hoped for. He who had loved her best had tried to find her. He was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, water-girt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of to-day buried to-morrow in ooze and slime.

The furnished room received its latest guest with a first glow of pseudo-hospitality, a hectic, haggard, perfunctory welcome like the specious smile of a demirep. The sophisticated comfort came in reflected gleams from the decayed furniture, the ragged brocade upholstery of a couch and two chairs, a foot-wide cheap pier glass between the two windows, from one or two gilt picture frames and a brass bedstead in a corner.

The guest reclined, inert, upon a chair, while the room, confused in speech as though it were an apartment in Babel, tried to discourse to him of its divers tenantry.

A polychromatic rug like some brilliant-flowered rectangular, tropical islet lay surrounded by a billowy sea of soiled matting. Upon the gay-papered wall were those pictures that pursue the homeless one from house to house—The Huguenot Lovers, The First Quarrel, The Wedding Breakfast, Psyche at the Fountain. The mantel's chastely severe outline was ingloriously veiled behind some pert drapery drawn rakishly askew like the sashes of the Amazonian ballet. Upon it was some desolate flotsam cast aside by the room's marooned when a lucky sail had borne them to a fresh port—a trifling vase or two, pictures of actresses, a medicine bottle, some stray cards out of a deck.

One by one, as the characters of a cryptograph become explicit, the little signs left by the furnished room's procession of guests developed a significance. The threadbare space in the rug in front of the dresser told that lovely woman had marched in the throng. Tiny finger prints on the wall spoke of little prisoners trying to feel their way to sun and air. A splattered stain, raying like the shadow of a bursting bomb, witnessed where a hurled glass or bottle had splintered with its contents against the wall. Across the pier glass had been scrawled with a diamond in staggering letters the name "Marie." It seemed that the succession of dwellers in the furnished room had turned in fury—perhaps tempted beyond forbearance by its garish coldness—and wreaked upon it their passions. The furniture was chipped and bruised; the couch, distorted by bursting springs, seemed a horrible monster that had been slain during the stress of some grotesque convulsion. Some more potent upheaval had cloven a great slice from the marble mantel. Each plank in the floor owned its particular cant and shriek as from a separate and individual agony. It seemed incredible that all this malice and injury had been wrought upon the room

by those who had called it for a time their home; and yet it may have been the cheated home instinct surviving blindly, the resentful rage at false household gods that had kindled their wrath. A hut that is our own we can sweep and adorn and cherish.

The young tenant in the chair allowed these thoughts to file, soft-shod, through his mind, while there drifted into the room furnished sounds and furnished scents. He heard in one room a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; in others the monologue of a scold, the rattling of dice, a lullaby, and one crying dully; above him a banjo tinkled with spirit. Doors banged somewhere; the elevated trains roared intermittently; a cat yowled miserably upon a back fence. And he breathed the breath of the house—a dank savour rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults mingled with the reeking exhalations of linoleum and mildewed and rotten woodwork.

Then, suddenly, as he rested there, the room was filled with the strong, sweet odour of mignonette. It came as upon a single buffet of wind with such sureness and fragrance and emphasis that it almost seemed a living visitant. And the man cried aloud: "What, dear?" as if he had been called, and sprang up and faced about. The rich odour clung to him and wrapped him around. He reached out his arms for it, all his senses for the time confused and commingled. How could one be peremptorily called by an odour? Surely it must have been a sound. But, was it not the sound that had touched, that had caressed him?

"She has been in this room," he cried, and he sprang to wrest from it a token, for he knew he would recognize the smallest thing that had belonged to her or that she had touched. This enveloping scent of mignonette, the odour that she had loved and made her own—whence came it?

The room had been but carelessly set in order. Scattered upon the flimsy dresser scarf were half a dozen hairpins—those discreet, indistinguishable friends of womankind, feminine of gender, infinite of mood and uncommunicative of tense. These he ignored, conscious of their triumphant lack of identity. Ransacking the drawers of the dresser he came upon a discarded, tiny, ragged handkerchief. He pressed it to his face. It was racy and insolent with heliotrope; he hurled it to the floor. In another drawer he found odd buttons, a theatre programme, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last was a woman's black satin hair bow, which halted him, poised between ice and fire. But the black satin hair-bow also is femininity's demure, impersonal, common ornament, and tells no tales.

And then he traversed the room like a hound on the scent, skimming the walls, considering the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees, rummaging mantel and tables, the curtains and hangings, the drunken cabinet in the corner, for a visible sign, unable to perceive that she was there beside, around, against, within, above him, clinging to him, wooing him, calling him so poignantly through the finer senses that even his grosser ones became cognisant of the call. Once again he answered loudly: "Yes, dear!" and turned, wild-eyed, to gaze on vacancy, for he could not yet discern form and colour and love and outstretched arms in the odour of mignonette. Oh, God! whence that odour, and since when have odours had a voice to call? Thus he groped.

He burrowed in crevices and corners, and found corks and cigarettes. These he passed in passive contempt. But once he found in a fold of the matting a half-smoked cigar, and this he ground beneath his heel with a green and trenchant oath. He sifted the room from end to end. He found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, and whose spirit seemed to hover there, he found no trace.

And then he thought of the housekeeper.

He ran from the haunted room downstairs and to a door that showed a crack of light. She came out to his knock. He smothered his excitement as best he could.

"Will you tell me, madam," he besought her, "who occupied the room I have before I came?"

"Yes, sir. I can tell you again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney, as I said. Miss B'retta Sprowls it was in the theatres, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over—"

"What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?"

"Why, black-haired, sir, short, and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday."

"And before they occupied it?"

"Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and her two children, that stayed four months; and back of them was old Mr. Doyle, whose sons paid for him. He kept the room six months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember."

He thanked her and crept back to his room. The room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odour of mouldy house furniture, of atmosphere in storage.

The ebbing of his hope drained his faith. He sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Soon he walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

* * * * *

It was Mrs. McCool's night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs. Purdy in one of those subterranean retreats where house-keepers foregather and the worm dieth seldom.

"I rented out my third floor, back, this evening," said Mrs. Purdy, across a fine circle of foam. "A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago."

"Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCool, with intense admiration. "You do be a wonder for rentin' rooms of that kind. And did ye tell him, then?" she concluded in a husky whisper, laden with mystery.

"Rooms," said Mrs. Purdy, in her furriest tones, "are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs. McCool."

"'Tis right ye are, ma'am; 'tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma'am. There be many people will rayjict the rentin' of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin' in the bed of it."

"As you say, we has our living to be making," remarked Mrs. Purdy.

"Yis, ma'am; 'tis true. 'Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third floor, back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin' herself wid the gas—a swate little face she had, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am."

"She'd a-been called handsome, as you say," said Mrs. Purdy, assenting but critical, "but for that mole she had a-growin' by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Mrs. McCool."

BABY'S BATH

from *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns*, by Arnold Bennett

I

Mrs Blackshaw had a baby. It would be an exaggeration to say that the baby interested the entire town, Bursley being an ancient, blase sort of borough of some thirty thousand inhabitants. Babies, in fact, arrived in Bursley at the rate of more than a thousand every year. Nevertheless, a few weeks after the advent of Mrs Blackshaw's baby, when the medical officer of health reported to the Town Council that the births for the month amounted to ninety-five, and that the birth-rate of Bursley compared favourably with the birth-rates of the sister towns, Hanbridge, Knype, Longshaw, and Turnhill--when the medical officer read these memorable words at the monthly meeting of the Council, and the Staffordshire Signal reported them, and Mrs Blackshaw perused them, a blush of pride spread over Mrs Blackshaw's face, and she picked up the baby's left foot and gave it a little peck of a kiss. She could not help feeling that the real solid foundation of that formidable and magnificent output of babies was her baby. She could not help feeling that she had done something for the town--had caught the public eye.

As for the baby, except that it was decidedly superior to the average infant in external appearance and pleasantness of disposition, it was, in all essential characteristics, a typical baby--that is to say, it was purely sensuous and it lived the life of the senses. It was utterly selfish. It never thought of anyone but itself. It honestly imagined itself to be the centre of the created universe. It was convinced that the rest of the universe had been brought into existence solely for the convenience and pleasure of it--the baby. When it wanted anything it made no secret of the fact, and it was always utterly unscrupulous in trying to get what it wanted. If it could have obtained the moon it would have upset all the astronomers of Europe and made Whitaker's Almanack unsalable without a pang. It had no god but its stomach. It never bothered its head about higher things. It was a bully and a coward, and it treated women as beings of a lower order than men. In a word, it was that ideal creature, sung of the poets, from which we gradually sink and fall away as we grow older.

At the age of six months it had quite a lot of hair, and a charming rosy expanse at the back of its neck, caused through lying on its back in contemplation of its own importance. It didn't know the date of the Battle of Hastings, but it knew with the certainty of absolute knowledge that it was master of the house, and that the activity of the house revolved round it.

Now, the baby loved its bath. In any case its bath would have been an affair of immense and intricate pomp; but the fact that it loved its bath raised the interest and significance of the bath to the nth power. The bath took place at five o'clock in the evening, and it is not too much to say that the idea of the bath was immanent in the very atmosphere of the house. When you have an appointment with the dentist at five o'clock in the afternoon the idea of the appointment is immanent in your mind from the first moment of your awakening. Conceive that an appointment with the dentist implies heavenly joy instead of infernal pain, and you will have a notion of the daily state of Mrs Blackshaw and Emmie (the nurse) with regard to the baby's bath.

Even at ten in the morning Emmie would be keeping an eye on the kitchen fire, lest the cook might let it out. And shortly after noon Mrs Blackshaw would be keeping an eye on the thermometer in the bedroom where the bath occurred. From four o'clock onwards the clocks in the house were spied on and overlooked like suspected persons; but they were used to that, because the baby had his sterilized milk every two hours. I have at length allowed you to penetrate the secret of his sex.

And so at five o'clock precisely the august and exciting ceremony began in the best bedroom. A bright fire was burning (the month being December), and the carefully-shaded electric lights were also burning. A large bath-towel was spread in a convenient place on the floor, and on the towel were two chairs facing each other, and a table. On one chair was the bath, and on the other was Mrs Blackshaw with her sleeves rolled up, and on Mrs Blackshaw was another towel, and on that towel was Roger (the baby). On the table were zinc ointment, vaseline, scentless eau de Cologne, Castile soap, and a powder-puff.

Emmie having pretty nearly filled the bath with a combination of hot and cold waters, dropped the floating thermometer into it, and then added more waters until the thermometer indicated the precise temperature proper for a baby's bath. But you are not to imagine that Mrs Blackshaw trusted a mere thermometer. No. She put her arm in the water up to the elbow. She reckoned the sensitive skin near the elbow was worth forty thermometers.

Emmie was chiefly an audience. Mrs Blackshaw had engaged her as a nurse, but she could have taught a nigger-boy to do all that she allowed the nurse to do. During the bath Mrs Blackshaw and Emmie hated and scorned each other, despite their joy. Emmie was twice Mrs Blackshaw's age, besides being twice her weight, and she knew twice as much about babies as Mrs Blackshaw did. However, Mrs Blackshaw had the terrific advantage of being the mother of that particular infant, and she could always end an argument when she chose, and in her own favour. It was unjust, and Emmie felt it to be unjust; but this is not a world of justice.

Roger, though not at all precocious, was perfectly aware of the carefully-concealed hostility between his mother and his nurse, and often, with his usual unscrupulousness, he used it for his own ends. He was sitting upon his mother's knees toying with the edge of the bath, already tasting its delights in advance. Mrs Blackshaw undressed the upper half of him, and then she laid him on the flat of his back and undressed the lower half of him, but keeping some wisp of a garment round his equatorial regions. And then she washed his face with a sponge and the Castile soap, very gently, but not half gently enough for Emmie, nor half gently enough for Roger, for Roger looked upon this part of the business as insulting and superfluous. He breathed hard and kicked his feet nearly off.

'Yes, it's dreadful having our face washed, isn't it?' said Mrs Blackshaw, with her sleeves up, and her hair by this time down. 'We don't like it, do we? Yes, yes.'

Emmie grunted, without a sound, and yet Mrs Blackshaw heard her, and finished that face quickly and turned to the hands.

'Potato-gardens every day,' she said. 'Evzy day-day. Enough of that, Colonel!' (For, after all, she had plenty of spirit.) 'Fat little creases! Fat little creases! There! He likes that! There! Feet! Feet! Feet and legs! Then our back. And then WHUP we shall go into the bath! That's it. Kick! Kick your mother!'

And she turned him over.

'Incredible bungler!' said the eyes of the nurse. 'Can't she turn him over neater than that?'

'Harridan!' said the eyes of Mrs Blackshaw. 'I wouldn't let you bath him for twenty thousand pounds!'

Roger continued to breathe hard, as if his mother were a horse and he were rubbing her down.

'Now! Zoop! Whup!' cried his mother, and having deprived him of his final rag, she picked him up and sat him in the bath, and he was divinely happy, and so were the women. He appeared a gross little animal in the bath, all the tints of his flesh shimmering under the electric light. His chest was superb, but the rolled and creased bigness of his inordinate stomach was simply appalling, not to mention his great thighs and calves. The truth was, he had grown so that if he had been only a little bit bigger, he would have burst the bath. He resembled an old man who had been steadily eating too much for about forty years.

His two womenfolk now candidly and openly worshipped him, forgetting

sectarian differences.

And he splashed. Oh! he splashed. You see, he had learnt how to splash, and he had certainly got an inkling that to splash was wicked and messy. So he splashed--in his mother's face, in Emmie's face, in the fire. He pretty well splashed the fire out. Ten minutes before, the bedroom had been tidy, a thing of beauty. It was now naught but a wild welter of towels, socks, binders--peninsulas of clothes nearly surrounded by water.

Finally his mother seized him again, and, rearing his little legs up out of the water, immersed the whole of his inflated torso beneath the surface.

'Hallo!' she exclaimed. 'Did the water run over his mouf? Did it?'

'Angels and ministers of grace defend us! How clumsy she is!' commented the eyes of Emmie.

'There! I fink that's about long enough for this kind of wevver,' said the mother.

'I should think it was! There's almost a crust of ice on the water now!' the nurse refrained from saying.

And Roger, full of regrets, was wrenched out of the bath. He had ceased breathing hard while in the water, but he began again immediately he emerged.

'We don't like our face wiped, do we?' said his mother on his behalf. 'We want to go back into that bath. We like it. It's more fun than anything that happens all day long! Eh? That old dandruff's coming up in fine style. It's a-peeling off like anything.'

And all the while she wiped him, patted eau de Cologne into him with the flat of her hand, and rubbed zinc ointment into him, and massaged him, and powdered him, and turned him over and over and over, till he was thoroughly well basted and cooked. And he kept on breathing hard.

Then he sneezed, amid general horror!

'I told you so!' the nurse didn't say, and she rushed to the bed where all the idol's beautiful, clean, aired things were lying safe from splashings, and handed a flannel shirt, about two inches in length, to Mrs Blackshaw. And Mrs Blackshaw rolled the left sleeve of it into a wad and stuck it over his arm, and his poor little vaccination marks were hidden from view till next morning. Roger protested.

'We don't like clothes, do we?' said his mother. 'We want to tumble

back into our tub. We aren't much for clothes anyway. We're a little Hottentot, aren't we?"

And she gradually covered him with one garment or another until there was nothing left of him but his head and his hands and feet. And she sat him up on her knees, so as to fasten his things behind. And then it might have been observed that he was no longer breathing hard, but giving vent to a sound between a laugh and a cry, while sucking his thumb and gazing round the room.

'That's our little affected cry that we start for our milk, isn't it?' his mother explained to him.

And he agreed that it was.

And before Emmie could fly across the room for the bottle, all ready and waiting, his mouth, in the shape of a perfect rectangle, had monopolized five-sixths of his face, and he was scarlet and bellowing with impatience.

He took the bottle like a tiger his prey, and seized his mother's hand that held the bottle, and he furiously pumped the milk into that insatiable gulf of a stomach. But he found time to gaze about the room too. A tear stood in each roving eye, caused by the effort of feeding.

'Yes, that's it,' said his mother. 'Now look round and see what's happening. Curiosity! Well, if you WILL bob your head, I can't help it.'

'Of course you can!' the nurse didn't say.

Then he put his finger into his mouth side by side with the bottle, and gagged himself, and choked, and gave a terrible--excuse the word--hiccough. After which he seemed to lose interest in the milk, and the pumping operations slackened and then ceased.

'Goosey!' whispered his mother, 'getting seepy? Is the sandman throwing sand in your eyes? Old Sandman at it? Sh--' ... He had gone.

Emmie took him. The women spoke in whispers. And Mrs Blackshaw, after a day spent in being a mother, reconstituted herself a wife, and began to beautify herself for her husband.

II

Yes, there was a Mr Blackshaw, and with Mr Blackshaw the tragedy of the

bath commences. Mr Blackshaw was a very important young man. Indeed, it is within the mark to say that, next to his son, he was the most important young man in Bursley. For Mr Blackshaw was the manager of the newly opened Municipal Electricity Works. And the Municipal Electricity had created more excitement and interest than anything since the 1887 Jubilee, when an ox was roasted whole in the market-place and turned bad in the process. Had Bursley been a Swiss village, or a French country town, or a hamlet in Arizona, it would have had its electricity fifteen years ago, but being only a progressive English Borough, with an annual value of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, it struggled on with gas till well into the twentieth century. Its great neighbour Hanbridge had become acquainted with electricity in the nineteenth century.

All the principal streets and squares, and every decent shop that Hanbridge competition had left standing, and many private houses, now lighted themselves by electricity, and the result was splendid and glaring and coldly yellow. Mr. Blackshaw developed into the hero of the hour. People looked at him in the street as though he had been the discoverer and original maker of electricity. And if the manager of the gasworks had not already committed murder, it was because the manager of the gasworks had a right sense of what was due to his position as vicar's churchwarden at St Peter's Church.

But greatness has its penalties. And the chief penalty of Mr Blackshaw's greatness was that he could not see Roger have his nightly bath. It was impossible for Mr Blackshaw to quit his arduous and responsible post before seven o'clock in the evening. Later on, when things were going more smoothly, he might be able to get away; but then, later on, his son's bath would not be so amusing and agreeable as it then, by all reports, was. The baby was, of course, bathed on Saturday nights, but Sunday afternoon and evening Mr Blackshaw was obliged to spend with his invalid mother at Longshaw. It was on the sole condition of his weekly presence thus in her house that she had consented not to live with the married pair. And so Mr Blackshaw could not witness Roger's bath. He adored Roger. He understood Roger. He weighed, nursed, and fed Roger. He was 'up' in all the newest theories of infant rearing. In short, Roger was his passion, and he knew everything of Roger except Roger's bath. And when his wife met him at the front door of a night at seven-thirty and launched instantly into a description of the wonders, delights, and excitations of Roger's latest bath, Mr Blackshaw was ready to tear his hair with disappointment and frustration.

'I suppose you couldn't put it off for a couple of hours one night, May?' he suggested at supper on the evening of the particular bath described above.

'Sidney!' protested Mrs Blackshaw, pained.

Mr Blackshaw felt that he had gone too far, and there was a silence.

'Well!' said Mr Blackshaw at length, 'I have just made up my mind. I'm going to see that Kid's bath, and, what's more, I'm going to see it tomorrow. I don't care what happens.'

'But how shall you manage to get away, darling?'

'You will telephone me about a quarter of an hour before you're ready to begin, and I'll pretend it's something very urgent, and scoot off.'

'Well, that will be lovely, darling!' said Mrs Blackshaw. 'I WOULD like you to see him in the bath, just once! He looks so--'

And so on.

The next day, Mr Blackshaw, that fearsome autocrat of the Municipal Electricity Works, was saying to himself all day that at five o'clock he was going to assist at the spectacle of his wonderful son's bath. The prospect inspired him. So much so that every hand on the place was doing its utmost in fear and trembling, and the whole affair was running with the precision and smoothness of a watch.

From four o'clock onwards, Mr Blackshaw, in the solemn, illuminated privacy of the managerial office, safe behind glass partitions, could no more contain his excitement. He hovered in front of the telephone, waiting for it to ring. Then, at a quarter to five, just when he felt he couldn't stand it any longer, and was about to ring up his wife instead of waiting for her to ring him up, he saw a burly shadow behind the glass door, and gave a desolate sigh. That shadow could only be thrown by one person, and that person was his Worship the Mayor of Bursley. His Worship entered the private office with mayoral assurance, pulling in his wake a stout old lady whom he introduced as his aunt from Wolverhampton. And he calmly proposed that Mr Blackshaw should show the mayoral aunt over the new Electricity Works!

Mr Blackshaw was sick of showing people over the Works. Moreover, he naturally despised the Mayor. All permanent officials of municipalities thoroughly despise their mayors (up their sleeves). A mayor is here today and gone tomorrow, whereas a permanent official is permanent. A mayor knows nothing about anything except his chain and the rules of debate, and he is, further, a tedious and meddlesome person--in the opinion of permanent officials.

So Mr Blackshaw's fury at the inept appearance of the Mayor and the mayoral aunt at this critical juncture may be imagined. The worst of it was, he didn't know how to refuse the Mayor.

Then the telephone-bell rang.

'Excuse me,' said Mr Blackshaw, with admirably simulated politeness, going to the instrument. 'Are you there? Who is it?'

'It's me, darling,' came the thin voice of his wife far away at Bleakridge. 'The water's just getting hot. We're nearly ready. Can you come now?'

'By Jove! Wait a moment!' exclaimed Mr Blackshaw, and then turning to his visitors, 'Did you hear that?'

'No,' said the Mayor.

'All those three new dynamos that they've got at the Hanbridge Electricity Works have just broken down. I knew they would. I told them they would!'

'Dear, dear!' said the Mayor of Bursley, secretly delighted by this disaster to a disdainful rival. 'Why! They'll have the town in darkness. What are they going to do?'

'They want me to go over at once. But, of course, I can't. At least, I must give myself the pleasure of showing you and this lady over our Works, first.'

'Nothing of the kind, Mr Blackshaw!' said the Mayor. 'Go at once. Go at once. If Bursley can be of any assistance to Hanbridge in such a crisis, I shall be only too pleased. We will come tomorrow, won't we, auntie?'

Mr Blackshaw addressed the telephone.

'The Mayor is here, with a lady, and I was just about to show them over the Works, but his Worship insists that I come at once.'

'Certainly,' the Mayor put in pompously.

'Wonders will never cease,' came the thin voice of Mrs Blackshaw through the telephone. 'It's very nice of the old thing! What's his lady friend like?'

'Not like anything. Unique!' replied Mr Blackshaw.

'Young?' came the voice.

'Dates from the thirties,' said Mr Blackshaw. 'I'm coming.' And rang off.

'I didn't know there was any electric machinery as old as that,' said the mayoral aunt.

'We'll just look about us a bit,' the Mayor remarked. 'Don't lose a moment, Mr Blackshaw.'

And Mr Blackshaw hurried off, wondering vaguely how he should explain the lie when it was found out, but not caring much. After all, he could easily ascribe the episode to the trick of some practical joker.

III

He arrived at his commodious and electrically lit residence in the very nick of time, and full to overflowing with innocent paternal glee. Was he not about to see Roger's tub? Roger was just ready to be carried upstairs as Mr Blackshaw's latchkey turned in the door.

'Wait a sec!' cried Mr Blackshaw to his wife, who had the child in her arms, 'I'll carry him up.'

And he threw away his hat, stick, and overcoat and grabbed ecstatically at the infant. And he had got perhaps halfway up the stairs, when lo! the electric light went out. Every electric light in the house went out.

'Great Scott!' breathed Mr Blackshaw, aghast.

He pulled aside the blind of the window at the turn of the stairs, and peered forth. The street was as black as your hat, or nearly so.

'Great Scott!' he repeated. 'May, get candles.'

Something had evidently gone wrong at the Works. Just his luck! He had quitted the Works for a quarter of an hour, and the current had failed!

Of course, the entire house was instantly in an uproar, turned upside down, startled out of its life. But a few candles soon calmed its transports. And at length Mr Blackshaw gained the bedroom in safety, with the offspring of his desires comfortable in a shawl.

'Give him to me,' said May shortly. 'I suppose you'll have to go back to the Works at once?'

Mr Blackshaw paused, and then nerved himself; but while he was pausing, May, glancing at the two feeble candles, remarked: 'It's very tiresome. I'm sure I shan't be able to see properly.'

'No!' almost shouted Mr Blackshaw. 'I'll watch this kid have his bath or I'll die for it! I don't care if all the Five Towns are in darkness. I don't care if the Mayor's aunt has got caught in a dynamo and is suffering horrible tortures. I've come to see this bath business, and dashed if I don't see it!'

'Well, don't stand between the bath and the fire, dearest,' said May coldly.

Meanwhile, Emmie, having pretty nearly filled the bath with a combination of hot and cold waters, dropped the floating thermometer into it, and then added more waters until the thermometer indicated the precise temperature proper for a baby's bath. But you are not to imagine that Mrs Blackshaw trusted a thermometer--

She did not, however, thrust her bared arm into the water this time. No! Roger, who never cried before his bath, was crying, was indubitably crying. And he cried louder and louder.

'Stand where he can't see you, dearest. He isn't used to you at bath-time,' said Mrs Blackshaw still coldly. 'Are you, my pet? There! There!'

Mr Blackshaw effaced himself, feeling a fool. But Roger continued to cry. He cried himself purple. He cried till the veins stood out on his forehead and his mouth was like a map of Australia. He cried himself into a monster of ugliness. Neither mother nor nurse could do anything with him at all.

'I think you've upset him, dearest,' said Mrs Blackshaw even more coldly. 'Hadn't you better go?'

'Well--' protested the father.

'I think you had better go,' said Mrs Blackshaw, adding no term of endearment, and visibly controlling herself with difficulty.

And Mr Blackshaw went. He had to go. He went out into the unelectric night. He headed for the Works, not because he cared twopence, at that moment, about the accident at the Works, whatever it was; but simply because the Works was the only place to go to. And even outside in the dark street he could hear the rousing accents of his progeny.

People were talking to each other as they groped about in the road, and either making jokes at the expense of the new Electricity Department, or frankly cursing it with true Five Towns directness of speech. And as Mr Blackshaw went down the hill into the town his heart was as black as the street itself with rage and disappointment. He had made his child

cry!

Someone stopped him.

'Eh, Mester Blackshaw!' said a voice, and under the voice a hand struck a match to light a pipe. 'What's th' maning o' this eclipse as you'm treating us to?'

Mr Blackshaw looked right through the inquirer--a way he had when his brain was working hard. And he suddenly smiled by the light of the match.

'That child wasn't crying because I was there,' said Mr Blackshaw with solemn relief. 'Not at all! He was crying because he didn't understand the candles. He isn't used to candles, and they frightened him.'

And he began to hurry towards the Works.

At the same instant the electric light returned to Bursley. The current was resumed.

'That's better,' said Mr Blackshaw, sighing.

THE HOME-COMING OF 'RASTUS SMITH

from *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, by Paul Laurence Dunbar

There was a great commotion in that part of town which was known as "Little Africa," and the cause of it was not far to seek. Contrary to the usual thing, this cause was not an excursion down the river, nor a revival, baptising, nor an Emancipation Day celebration. None of these was it that had aroused the denizens of "Little Africa," and kept them talking across the street from window to window, from door to door, through alley gates, over backyard fences, where they stood loud-mouthed and arms akimboed among laden clothes lines. No, the cause of it all was that Erastus Smith, Aunt Mandy Smith's boy, who had gone away from home several years before, and who, rumour said, had become a great man, was coming back, and "Little Africa," from Douglass Street to Cat Alley, was prepared to be dazzled. So few of those who had been born within the mile radius which was "Little Africa" went out into the great world and came into contact with the larger humanity that when one did he became a man set apart. And when, besides, he went into a great city and worked for a lawyer whose name was known the country over, the place of his birth had all the more reason to feel proud of her son.

So there was much talk across the dirty little streets, and Aunt Mandy's small house found itself all of a sudden a very popular resort. The old women held Erastus up as an example to their sons. The old men told what they might have done had they had his chance. The young men cursed him, and the young girls giggled and waited.

It was about an hour before the time of the arrival of Erastus, and the neighbours had thinned out one by one with a delicacy rather surprising in them, in order that the old lady might be alone with her boy for the first few minutes. Only one remained to help put the finishing touches to the two little rooms which Mrs. Smith called home, and to the preparations for the great dinner. The old woman wiped her eyes as she said to her companion, "Hit do seem a speshul blessin', Lizy, dat I been spaihed to see dat chile once mo' in de flesh. He sholy was mighty nigh to my hea't, an' w'en he went erway, I thought it 'ud kill me. But I kin see now dat hit uz all fu' de bes'. Think o' 'Rastus comin' home, er big man! Who'd evah 'specked dat?"

"Law, Mis' Smif, you sholy is got reason to be mighty thankful. Des' look how many young men dere is in dis town what ain't nevah been no 'count to dey pa'ents, ner anybody else."

"Well, it's onexpected, Lizy, an' hit's 'spected. 'Rastus allus wuz a wonnerful chil', an' de way he tuk to work an' study kin' o' promised something f'om de commencement, an' I 'lowed mebbe he tu'n out a preachah."

"Tush! yo' kin thank yo' stahs he didn't tu'n out no preachah. Preachahs ain't no bettah den anybody else dese days. Dey des go roun' tellin' dey lies an' eatin' de whiders an' orphins out o' house an' home."

"Well, mebbe hit's bes' he didn' tu'n out dat way. But f'om de way he used to stan' on de chaih an' 'zort w'en he was a little boy, I thought hit was des what he 'ud tu'n out. O' co'se, being' in a law office is des as pervidin', but somehow hit do seem mo' worl'y."

"Didn't I tell you de preachahs is ez worldly ez anybody else?"

"Yes, yes, dat's right, but den 'Rastus, he had de eddication, fo' he had gone thoo de Third Readah."

Just then the gate creaked, and a little brown-faced girl, with large, mild eyes, pushed open the door and came shyly in.

"Hyeah's some flowahs, Mis' Smif," she said. "I thought mebbe you might like to decorate 'Rastus's room," and she wiped the confusion from her face with her apron.

"La, chil', thankee. Dese is mighty pu'tty posies." These were the laurels which Sally Martin had brought to lay at the feet of her home-coming hero. No one in Cat Alley but that queer, quiet little girl would have thought of decorating anybody's room with flowers, but she had peculiar notions.

In the old days, when they were children, and before Erastus had gone away to become great, they had gone up and down together along the byways of their locality, and had loved as children love. Later, when Erastus began keeping company, it was upon Sally that he bestowed his affections. No one, not even her mother, knew how she had waited for him all these years that he had been gone, few in reality, but so long and so many to her.

And now he was coming home. She scorched something in the ironing that day because tears of joy were blinding her eyes. Her thoughts were busy with the meeting that was to be. She had a brand new dress for the occasion--a lawn, with dark blue dots, and a blue sash--and there was a new hat, wonderful with the flowers of summer, and for both of them she had spent her hard-earned savings, because she wished to be radiant in the eyes of the man who loved her.

Of course, Erastus had not written her; but he must have been busy, and writing was hard work. She knew that herself, and realised it all the more as she penned the loving little scrawls which at first she used to send him. Now they would not have to do any writing any more; they could say what they wanted to each other. He was coming home at last, and she had waited long.

They paint angels with shining faces and halos, but for real radiance one should have looked into the dark eyes of Sally as she sped home after her contribution to her lover's reception.

When the last one of the neighbours had gone Aunt Mandy sat down to rest herself and to await the great event. She had not sat there long before the gate creaked. She arose and hastened to the window. A young man was coming down the path. Was that 'Rastus? Could that be her 'Rastus, that gorgeous creature with the shiny shoes and the nobby suit and the carelessly-swung cane? But he was knocking at her door, and she opened it and took him into her arms.

"Why, howdy, honey, howdy; hit do beat all to see you agin, a great big, grown-up man. You're lookin' des' lak one o' de big folks up in town."

Erastus submitted to her endearments with a somewhat condescending grace, as who should say, "Well, poor old fool, let her go on this time; she doesn't know any better." He smiled superiorly when the old woman wept glad tears, as mothers have a way of doing over returned sons, however great fools these sons may be. She set him down to the dinner which she had prepared for him, and with loving patience drew from his pompous and reluctant lips some of the story of his doings and some little word about the places he had seen.

"Oh, yes," he said, crossing his legs, "as soon as Mr. Carrington saw that I was pretty bright, he took me right up and gave me a good job, and I have been working for him right straight along for seven years now. Of course, it don't do to let white folks know all you're thinking; but I have kept my ears and my eyes right open, and I guess I know just about as much about law as he does himself. When I save up a little more I'm going to put on the finishing touches and hang out my shingle."

"Don't you nevah think no mo' 'bout bein' a preachah, 'Rastus?" his mother asked.

"Haw, haw! Preachah? Well, I guess not; no preaching in mine; there's nothing in it. In law you always have a chance to get into politics and be the president of your ward club or something like that, and from that on it's an easy matter to go on up. You can trust me to know the wires." And so the tenor of his boastful talk ran on, his mother a little bit awed and not altogether satisfied with the new 'Rastus that had returned to her.

He did not stay in long that evening, although his mother told him some of the neighbours were going to drop in. He said he wanted to go about and see something of the town. He paused just long enough to glance at the flowers in his room, and to his mother's remark, "Sally Ma'tin brung dem in," he returned answer, "Who on earth is Sally Martin?"

"Why, 'Rastus," exclaimed his mother, "does yo' 'tend lak yo' don't 'member little Sally Ma'tin yo' used to go wid almos' f'om de time you was babies? W'y, I'm s'prised at you."

"She has slipped my mind," said the young man.

For a long while the neighbours who had come and Aunt Mandy sat up to wait for Erastus, but he did not come in until the last one was gone. In fact, he did not get in until nearly four o'clock in the morning, looking a little weak, but at least in the best of spirits, and he vouchsafed to his waiting mother the remark that "the little old town wasn't so bad, after all."

Aunt Mandy preferred the request that she had had in mind for some time, that he would go to church the next day, and he consented, because his trunk had come.

It was a glorious Sunday morning, and the old lady was very proud in her stiff gingham dress as she saw her son come into the room arrayed in his long coat, shiny hat, and shinier shoes. Well, if it was true that he was changed, he was still her 'Rastus, and a great comfort to her. There was no vanity about the old woman, but she paused before the glass a longer time than usual, settling her bonnet strings, for she must look right, she told herself, to walk to church with that elegant son of hers. When he was all ready, with cane in hand, and she was pausing with the key in the door, he said, "Just walk on, mother, I'll catch you in a minute or two." She went on and left him.

He did not catch her that morning on her way to church, and it was a sore disappointment, but it was somewhat compensated for when she saw him stalking into the chapel in all his glory, and every head in the house turned to behold him.

There was one other woman in "Little Africa" that morning who stopped for a longer time than usual before her looking-glass and who had never found her bonnet strings quite so refractory before. In spite of the vexation of flowers that wouldn't settle and ribbons that wouldn't tie, a very glad face looked back at Sally Martin from her little mirror. She was going to see 'Rastus, 'Rastus of the old days in which they used to walk hand in hand. He had told her when he went away that some day he would come back and marry her. Her heart fluttered hotly under her dotted lawn, and it took another application of the chamois to take the perspiration from her face. People had laughed at her, but that morning she would be vindicated. He would walk home with her before the whole church. Already she saw him bowing before her, hat in hand, and heard the set phrase, "May I have the pleasure of your company home?" and she saw herself sailing away upon his arm.

She was very happy as she sat in church that morning, as happy as Mrs. Smith herself, and as proud when she saw the object of her affections swinging up the aisle to the collection table, and from the ring she knew that it could not be less than a half dollar that he put in.

There was a special note of praise in her voice as she joined in singing the doxology that morning, and her heart kept quivering and fluttering like a frightened bird as the people gathered in groups, chattering and shaking hands, and he drew nearer to her. Now they were almost together; in a moment their eyes would meet. Her breath came quickly; he had looked at her, surely he must have seen her. His mother was just behind him, and he did not speak. Maybe she had changed, maybe he had forgotten her. An unaccustomed boldness took possession of her, and she determined that she would not be overlooked. She pressed forward. She saw his mother take his arm and heard her whisper, "Dere's Sally Ma'tin" this time, and she knew that he looked at her. He bowed as if to a stranger, and was past her the next minute. When she saw him again he was swinging out of the door between two admiring lines of church-goers who separated on the pavement. There was a brazen yellow girl on his arm.

She felt weak and sick as she hid behind the crowd as well as she could, and for that morning she thanked God that she was small.

Aunt Mandy trudged home alone, and when the street was cleared and the sexton was about to lock up, the girl slipped out of the church and down to her own little house. In the friendly shelter of her room she took off her gay attire and laid it away, and then sat down at the window and looked dully out. For her, the light of day had gone out.

THE DOOR OF THE TRAP

from *Triumph of the Egg and Other Stories*, by Sherwood Anderson

Winifred Walker understood some things clearly enough. She understood that when a man is put behind iron bars he is in prison. Marriage was marriage to her.

It was that to her husband Hugh Walker, too, as he found out. Still he didn't understand. It might have been better had he understood, then he might at least have found himself. He didn't. After his marriage five or six years passed like shadows of wind blown trees playing on a wall. He was in a drugged, silent state. In the morning and evening every day he saw his wife. Occasionally something happened within him and he kissed her. Three children were born. He taught mathematics in the little college at Union Valley, Illinois, and waited.

For what? He began to ask himself that question. It came to him at first faintly like an echo. Then it became an insistent question. "I want answering," the question seemed to say. "Stop fooling along. Give your attention to me."

Hugh walked through the streets of the Illinois town. "Well, I'm married. I have children," he muttered.

He went home to his own house. He did not have to live within his income from the little college, and so the house was rather large and comfortably furnished. There was a negro woman who took care of the children and another who cooked and did the housework. One of the women was in the habit of crooning low soft negro songs. Sometimes Hugh stopped at the house door and listened. He could see through the glass in the door into the room where his family was gathered. Two children played with blocks on the floor. His wife sat sewing. The old negress sat in a rocking chair with his youngest child, a baby, in her arms. The whole room seemed under the spell of the crooning voice. Hugh fell under the spell. He waited in silence. The voice carried him far away somewhere, into forests, along the edges of swamps. There was nothing very definite about his thinking. He would have given a good deal to be able to be definite.

He went inside the house. "Well, here I am," his mind seemed to say, "here I am. This is my house, these are my children."

He looked at his wife Winifred. She had grown a little plump since their marriage. "Perhaps it is the mother in her coming out, she has had three children," he thought.

The crooning old negro woman went away, taking the youngest child with her. He and Winifred held a fragmentary conversation. "Have you been

well to-day, dear?" she asked. "Yes," he answered.

If the two older children were intent on their play his chain of thought was not broken. His wife never broke it as the children did when they came running to pull and tear at him. Throughout the early evening, after the children went to bed, the surface of the shell of him was not broken at all. A brother college professor and his wife came in or he and Winifred went to a neighbor's house. There was talk. Even when he and Winifred were alone together in the house there was talk. "The shutters are becoming loose," she said. The house was an old one and had green shutters. They were continually coming loose and at night blew back and forth on their hinges making a loud banging noise.

Hugh made some remark. He said he would see a carpenter about the shutters. Then his mind began playing away, out of his wife's presence, out of the house, in another sphere. "I am a house and my shutters are loose," his mind said. He thought of himself as a living thing inside a shell, trying to break out. To avoid distracting conversation he got a book and pretended to read. When his wife had also begun to read he watched her closely, intently. Her nose was so and so and her eyes so and so. She had a little habit with her hands. When she became lost in the pages of a book the hand crept up to her cheek, touched it and then was put down again. Her hair was not in very good order. Since her marriage and the coming of the children she had not taken good care of her body. When she read her body slumped down in the chair. It became bag-like. She was one whose race had been run.

Hugh's mind played all about the figure of his wife but did not really approach the woman who sat before him. It was so with his children. Sometimes, just for a moment, they were living things to him, things as alive as his own body. Then for long periods they seemed to go far away like the crooning voice of the negress.

It was odd that the negress was always real enough. He felt an understanding existed between himself and the negress. She was outside his life. He could look at her as at a tree. Sometimes in the evening when she had been putting the children to bed in the upper part of the house and when he sat with a book in his hand pretending to read, the old black woman came softly through the room, going toward the kitchen. She did not look at Winifred, but at Hugh. He thought there was a strange, soft light in her old eyes. "I understand you, my son," her eyes seemed to say.

Hugh was determined to get his life cleaned up if he could manage it. "All right, then," he said, as though speaking to a third person in the room. He was quite sure there was a third person there and that the third person was within himself, inside his body. He addressed the third person.

"Well, there is this woman, this person I married, she has the air of something accomplished," he said, as though speaking aloud. Sometimes it almost seemed to him he had spoken aloud and he looked quickly and sharply at his wife. She continued reading, lost in her book. "That may be it," he went on. "She has had these children. They are accomplished facts to her. They came out of her body, not out of mine. Her body has done something. Now it rests. If she is becoming a little bag-like, that's all right."

He got up and making some trivial excuse got out of the room and out of the house. In his youth and young manhood the long periods of walking straight ahead through the country, that had come upon him like visitations of some recurring disease, had helped. Walking solved nothing. It only tired his body, but when his body was tired he could sleep. After many days of walking and sleeping something occurred. The reality of life was in some queer way re-established in his mind. Some little thing happened. A man walking in the road before him threw a stone at a dog that ran barking out of a farm-house. It was evening perhaps, and he walked in a country of low hills. Suddenly he came out upon the top of one of the hills. Before him the road dipped down into darkness but to the west, across fields, there was a farm-house. The sun had gone down, but a faint glow lit the western horizon. A woman came out of the farmhouse and went toward a barn. He could not see her figure distinctly. She seemed to be carrying something, no doubt a milk pail; she was going to a barn to milk a cow.

The man in the road who had thrown the stone at the farm dog had turned and seen Hugh in the road behind him. He was a little ashamed of having been afraid of the dog. For a moment he seemed about to wait and speak to Hugh, and then was overcome with confusion and hurried away. He was a middle-aged man, but quite suddenly and unexpectedly he looked like a boy.

As for the farm woman, dimly seen going toward a distant barn, she also stopped and looked toward him. It was impossible she should have seen him. She was dressed in white and he could see her but dimly against the blackish green of the trees of an orchard behind her. Still she stood looking and seemed to look directly into his eyes. He had a queer sensation of her having been lifted by an unseen hand and brought to him. It seemed to him he knew all about her life, all about the life of the man who had thrown the stone at the dog.

In his youth, when life had stepped out of his grasp, Hugh had walked and walked until several such things had occurred and then suddenly he was all right again and could again work and live among men.

After his marriage and after such an evening at home he started walking rapidly as soon as he left the house. As quickly as possible he got out of town and struck out along a road that led over the rolling prairie.

"Well, I can't walk for days and days as I did once," he thought. "There are certain facts in life and I must face facts. Winifred, my wife, is a fact, and my children are facts. I must get my fingers on facts. I must live by them and with them. It's the way lives are lived."

Hugh got out of town and on to a road that ran between cornfields. He was an athletic looking man and wore loose fitting clothes. He went along distraught and puzzled. In a way he felt like a man capable of taking a man's place in life and in another way he didn't at all.

The country spread out, wide, in all directions. It was always night when he walked thus and he could not see, but the realization of distances was always with him. "Everything goes on and on but I stand still," he thought. He had been a professor in the little college for six years. Young men and women had come into a room and he had taught them. It was nothing. Words and figures had been played with. An effort had been made to arouse minds.

For what?

There was the old question, always coming back, always wanting answering as a little animal wants food. Hugh gave up trying to answer. He walked rapidly, trying to grow physically tired. He made his mind attend to little things in the effort to forget distances. One night he got out of the road and walked completely around a cornfield. He counted the stalks in each hill of corn and computed the number of stalks in a whole field. "It should yield twelve hundred bushels of corn, that field," he said to himself dumbly, as though it mattered to him. He pulled a little handful of cornsilk out of the top of an ear of corn and played with it. He tried to fashion himself a yellow moustache. "I'd be quite a fellow with a trim yellow moustache," he thought.

One day in his class-room Hugh suddenly began to look with new interest at his pupils. A young girl attracted his attention. She sat beside the son of a Union Valley merchant and the young man was writing something on the back of a book. She looked at it and then turned her head away. The young man waited.

It was winter and the merchant's son had asked the girl to go with him to a skating party. Hugh, however, did not know that. He felt suddenly old. When he asked the girl a question she was confused. Her voice trembled.

When the class was dismissed an amazing thing happened. He asked the merchant's son to stay for a moment and, when the two were alone together in the room, he grew suddenly and furiously angry. His voice was, however, cold and steady. "Young man," he said, "you do not come

into this room to write on the back of a book and waste your time. If I see anything of the kind again I'll do something you don't expect. I'll throw you out through a window, that's what I'll do."

Hugh made a gesture and the young man went away, white and silent. Hugh felt miserable. For several days he thought about the girl who had quite accidentally attracted his attention. "I'll get acquainted with her. I'll find out about her," he thought.

It was not an unusual thing for professors in the college at Union Valley to take students home to their houses. Hugh decided he would take the girl to his home. He thought about it several days and late one afternoon saw her going down the college hill ahead of him.

The girl's name was Mary Cochran and she had come to the school but a few months before from a place called Huntersburg, Illinois, no doubt just such another place as Union Valley. He knew nothing of her except that her father was dead, her mother too, perhaps. He walked rapidly down the hill to overtake her. "Miss Cochran," he called, and was surprised to find that his voice trembled a little. "What am I so eager about?" he asked himself. A new life began in Hugh Walker's house. It was good for the man to have some one there who did not belong to him, and Winifred Walker and the children accepted the presence of the girl. Winifred urged her to come again. She did come several times a week.

To Mary Cochran it was comforting to be in the presence of a family of children. On winter afternoons she took Hugh's two sons and a sled and went to a small hill near the house. Shouts arose. Mary Cochran pulled the sled up the hill and the children followed. Then they all came tearing down together.

The girl, developing rapidly into womanhood, looked upon Hugh Walker as something that stood completely outside her own life. She and the man who had become suddenly and intensely interested in her had little to say to each other and Winifred seemed to have accepted her without question as an addition to the household. Often in the afternoon when the two negro women were busy she went away leaving the two older children in Mary's charge.

It was late afternoon and perhaps Hugh had walked home with Mary from the college. In the spring he worked in the neglected garden. It had been plowed and planted, but he took a hoe and rake and puttered about. The children played about the house with the college girl. Hugh did not look at them but at her. "She is one of the world of people with whom I live and with whom I am supposed to work here," he thought. "Unlike Winifred and these children she does not belong to me. I could go to her now, touch her fingers, look at her and then go away and never see her again."

That thought was a comfort to the distraught man. In the evening when he went out to walk the sense of distance that lay all about him did not tempt him to walk and walk, going half insanelly forward for hours, trying to break through an intangible wall.

He thought about Mary Cochran. She was a girl from a country town. She must be like millions of American girls. He wondered what went on in her mind as she sat in his class-room, as she walked beside him along the streets of Union Valley, as she played with the children in the yard beside his house.

In the winter, when in the growing darkness of a late afternoon Mary and the children built a snow man in the yard, he went upstairs and stood in the darkness to look out a window. The tall straight figure of the girl, dimly seen, moved quickly about. "Well, nothing has happened to her. She may be anything or nothing. Her figure is like a young tree that has not borne fruit," he thought. He went away to his own room and sat for a long time in the darkness. That night when he left the house for his evening's walk he did not stay long but hurried home and went to his own room. He locked the door. Unconsciously he did not want Winifred to come to the door and disturb his thoughts. Sometimes she did that.

All the time she read novels. She read the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson. When she had read them all she began again.

Sometimes she came upstairs and stood talking by his door. She told some tale, repeated some wise saying that had fallen unexpectedly from the lips of the children. Occasionally she came into the room and turned out the light. There was a couch by a window. She went to sit on the edge of the couch. Something happened. It was as it had been before their marriage. New life came into her figure. He also went to sit on the couch and she put up her hand and touched his face.

Hugh did not want that to happen now. He stood within the room for a moment and then unlocked the door and went to the head of the stairs. "Be quiet when you come up, Winifred. I have a headache and am going to try to sleep," he lied.

When he had gone back to his own room and locked the door again he felt safe. He did not undress but threw himself on the couch and turned out the light.

He thought about Mary Cochran, the school girl, but was sure he thought about her in a quite impersonal way. She was like the woman going to milk cows he had seen across hills when he was a young fellow and walked far and wide over the country to cure the restlessness in himself. In his life she was like the man who threw the stone at dog.

"Well, she is unformed; she is like a young tree," he told himself again. "People are like that. They just grow up suddenly out of childhood. It will happen to my own children. My little Winifred that cannot yet say words will suddenly be like this girl. I have not selected her to think about for any particular reason. For some reason I have drawn away from life and she has brought me back. It might have happened when I saw a child playing in the street or an old man going up a stairway into a house. She does not belong to me. She will go away out of my sight. Winifred and the children will stay on and on here and I will stay on and on. We are imprisoned by the fact that we belong to each other. This Mary Cochran is free, or at least she is free as far as this prison is concerned. No doubt she will, after a while make a prison of her own and live in it, but I will have nothing to do with the matter."

By the time Mary Cochran was in her third year in the college at Union Valley she had become almost a fixture in the Walker household. Still she did not know Hugh. She knew the children better than he did, perhaps better than their mother. In the fall she and the two boys went to the woods to gather nuts. In the winter they went skating on a little pond near the house.

Winifred accepted her as she accepted everything, the service of the two negroes, the coming of the children, the habitual silence of her husband.

And then quite suddenly and unexpectedly Hugh's silence, that had lasted all through his married life, was broken up. He walked homeward with a German who had the chair of modern languages in the school and got into a violent quarrel. He stopped to speak to men on the street. When he went to putter about in the garden he whistled and sang.

One afternoon in the fall he came home and found the whole family assembled in the living room of the house. The children were playing on the floor and the negress sat in the chair by the window with his youngest child in her arms, crooning one of the negro songs. Mary Cochran was there. She sat reading a book.

Hugh walked directly toward her and looked over her shoulder. At that moment Winifred came into the room. He reached forward and snatched the book out of the girl's hands. She looked up startled. With an oath he threw it into the fire that burned in an open grate at the side of the room. A flood of words ran from him. He cursed books and people and schools. "Damn it all," he said. "What makes you want to read about life? What makes people want to think about life? Why don't they live? Why don't they leave books and thoughts and schools alone?"

He turned to look at his wife who had grown pale and stared at him with a queer fixed uncertain stare. The old negro woman got up and went

quickly away. The two older children began to cry. Hugh was miserable. He looked at the startled girl in the chair who also had tears in her eyes, and at his wife. His fingers pulled nervously at his coat. To the two women he looked like a boy who had been caught stealing food in a pantry. "I am having one of my silly irritable spells," he said, looking at his wife but in reality addressing the girl. "You see I am more serious than I pretend to be. I was not irritated by your book but by something else. I see so much that can be done in life and I do so little."

He went upstairs to his own room wondering why he had lied to the two women, why he continually lied to himself.

Did he lie to himself? He tried to answer the question but couldn't. He was like one who walks in the darkness of the hallway of a house and comes to a blank wall. The old desire to run away from life, to wear himself out physically, came back upon him like a madness.

For a long time he stood in the darkness inside his own room. The children stopped crying and the house became quiet again. He could hear his wife's voice speaking softly and presently the back door of the house banged and he knew the schoolgirl had gone away.

Life in the house began again. Nothing happened. Hugh ate his dinner in silence and went for a long walk. For two weeks Mary Cochran did not come to his house and then one day he saw her on the college grounds. She was no longer one of his pupils. "Please do not desert us because of my rudeness," he said. The girl blushed and said nothing. When he got home that evening she was in the yard beside the house playing with the children. He went at once to his own room. A hard smile came and went on his face. "She isn't like a young tree any more. She is almost like Winifred. She is almost like a person who belongs here, who belongs to me and my life," he thought.

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Mary Cochran's visits to the Walker household came to an end very abruptly. One evening when Hugh was in his room she came up the stairway with the two boys. She had dined with the family and was putting the two boys into their beds. It was a privilege she claimed when she dined with the Walkers.

Hugh had hurried upstairs immediately after dining. He knew where his wife was. She was downstairs, sitting under a lamp, reading one of the books of Robert Louis Stevenson.

For a long time Hugh could hear the voices of his children on the floor above. Then the thing happened.

Mary Cochran came down the stairway that led past the door of his room. She stopped, turned back and climbed the stairs again to the room above. Hugh arose and stepped into the hallway. The schoolgirl had returned to the children's room because she had been suddenly overtaken with a hunger to kiss Hugh's oldest boy, now a lad of nine. She crept into the room and stood for a long time looking at the two boys, who unaware of her presence had gone to sleep. Then she stole forward and kissed the boy lightly. When she went out of the room Hugh stood in the darkness waiting for her. He took hold of her hand and led her down the stairs to his own room.

She was terribly afraid and her fright in an odd way pleased him. "Well," he whispered, "you can't understand now what's going to happen here but some day you will. I'm going to kiss you and then I'm going to ask you to go out of this house and never come back."

He held the girl against his body and kissed her upon the cheeks and lips. When he led her to the door she was so weak with fright and with new, strange, trembling desires that she could with difficulty make her way down the stair and into his wife's presence. "She will lie now," he thought, and heard her voice coming up the stairs like an echo to his thoughts. "I have a terrible headache. I must hurry home," he heard her voice saying. The voice was dull and heavy. It was not the voice of a young girl.

"She is no longer like a young tree," he thought. He was glad and proud of what he had done. When he heard the door at the back of the house close softly his heart jumped. A strange quivering light came into his eyes. "She will be imprisoned but I will have nothing to do with it. She will never belong to me. My hands will never build a prison for her," he thought with grim pleasure.
